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THE FIRST LABOUR GOVERNMENT
1924

(*Elliott & Fry Ltd.*)

LABOUR CABINET 1924

Back row: L to R: Sidney Webb, John Wheatley, F. W. Jowett.
2nd row: L to R: C. P. Trevelyan, Stephen Walsh, Lord Thomson, Lord Chelmsford, Lord Olivier, Noel Buxton, Josiah Wedgwood, Vernon Hartshorn, Tom Shaw.
Front row: L to R: William Adamson, Lord Parmoor, Philip Snowden, Lord Haldane, J. Ramsay Macdonald, J. R. Clynes,

THE FIRST LABOUR GOVERNMENT

1924

by

RICHARD W. LYMAN

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TO

MY PARENTS

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	Foreword	ix
I	The Labour Party, 1918–1923	1
II	The Election of 1923: The Conservatives "Suicide during a fit of temporary insanity"	18
III	The Election of 1923: The Liberals Lloyd George and the Dragon	42
IV	The Election of 1923: Labour The Politics of Glorious Aspirations	53
V	Results of the Election of 1923: A House Divided	69
VI	The Path to Office	81
VII	Cabinet Making	96
VIII	Housing: Mr. Wheatley Makes His Mark	110
IX	Unemployment: The Intractable Million	131
X	The European Problem: Year of Opportunity	157
XI	Russia: Path of Most Resistance	184
XII	Labourites, Socialists and Reformers	210
XIII	Problems of Minority Government	230
XIV	The Election of 1924: Red Letter Day	248
XV	The Election of 1924: Dimensions of Defeat	264
XVI	Aftermath	272
	Appendix A: The First Labour Ministry	284
	Appendix B: The Unsolved Mystery of the Zinoviev Letter	286
	Bibliographical Note	290
	Index	295

FOREWORD

This book, whose subject lies in the middle ground between contemporary politics and history, clearly makes no claim to be the final word on the first Labour Government. What is attempted here is rather a study of the Labour Party's first tenure of office taken as an episode, and a particularly important one, in the life and development of the party.

One must necessarily approach the publication of a book concerning the political life of a country not one's own with some feeling of inadequacy. There are serious risks in undertaking to speak with any authority on such a subject. One can but hope to substitute some of the virtues of detachment, or at least of a fresh perspective, for those of intimate familiarity.

There are many people to whom I am grateful for help with this book. Professor David E. Owen, who enjoys the gratitude and affection of so many young scholars, I thank for his patience, his wit, and his unfailing kindliness exercised at all stages of the work. Sir Geoffrey Crowther has helped in a score of ways, all of them important and deeply appreciated. Dr. Paul G. Clark gave helpful advice, and sets an example of disinterested scholarship and lively curiosity that is always heartening. To my wife I am grateful for all sorts of assistance, from the chore of checking references to the important matter of believing in the project and its author.

I am obliged to members of the staffs of several libraries: those of Harvard, Yale and Washington Universities in the United States, the British Library of Political and Economic Science, the British Museum, and the Labour Party Library at Transport House, in England. The generosity of the Graduate School and the Social Science Institute of Washington University helped towards the preparation of the manuscript for publication. Miss Ann Mitchell and Miss Marjorie Karlson each gave invaluable assistance that was quite outside her usual line of duty.

Among many others who gave assistance or encouragement,

space permits mention of but a few: the late R. J. Cruikshank, Mr. Carol Johnson, Mr. R. T. McKenzie, Mr. Reginald Bassett, Dr. Stephen R. Graubard, and the man with whom I began the study of modern English history, Dr. Laurence Lafore. I owe much, in addition, to those who were kind enough to give me interviews during my stay in Britain; their names are to be found in the bibliographical note at the end of the book.

Finally, I share with thousands of others a debt of gratitude to the author of that enlightened legislation which has helped so many of us to study abroad since World War II, Senator William J. Fulbright of Arkansas.

Washington University, R.W.L.
St. Louis.
May 1957.

I

THE LABOUR PARTY, 1918–1923

On the eve of the first World War, there were few indications indeed that the Labour Party was destined ever to rule in Britain. Born in 1900 of an inspired determination on the part of James Keir Hardie and a few fellow visionaries to see socialists and trade unionists in political alliance, the infant party was nourished through its earliest years by the resentment of the trade unions at the Taff Vale decision of 1901.* Their fear lest the right to strike become nugatory brought about the election of some thirty Labour M.P.s in 1905. The party's greatest pre-war success was the legislation of 1906 that safeguarded the unions against a repetition of Taff Vale. But the Liberal Government's appetite for social reform dwindled after the House of Lords crisis and the Lloyd George social insurance schemes of 1911. Labour strength in the House of Commons failed to increase, even dropped, after 1910. The party had to wait several years before it could even secure Parliamentary reversal of the Osborne judgment,† which threatened its life-blood, the political levy from affiliated trade unions. Loss of momentum accentuated internal differences; the alliance of socialists, however undoctrinaire, with trade unionists who saw

*In this case (Taff Vale Rly Co. *v.* Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants) the House of Lords ruled that a civil action could be brought against a trade union and that it could be sued for damages arising out of the actions of its officers or servants during a trade dispute. Damages of £23,000 were awarded against the A.S.R.S. This decision deprived the trade unions of an immunity they had been generally believed to possess, and by making almost any kind of strike action hazardous, undermined the whole position they had built up.

†Osborne *v.* A.S.R.S. (1909). The judgment of the House of Lords declared all political action by Trade Unions to be *ultra vires*, and thus prevented them from either putting forward their own candidates at national or local elections or subscribing out of their funds to any political party.

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in the party little more than a weapon for the defence of the unions' position was difficult at best. In 1911–12, Parliamentary action was overshadowed by the strange, semi-syndicalist wave of strikes. By 1914, the new and ominous Triple Alliance, formed by the miners', transport workers', and railwaymen's unions for the purpose of supporting each other's claims in disputes, might well have seemed a greater portent than the stagnating Labour Party.

Superficially, the war only made things worse, for to the old tensions between socialist and trade unionist were added new ones between pro-war and "pacifist" Labourites. Since the latter were concentrated in the Independent Labour Party, largest of the socialist societies affiliated to the Labour Party, there was some danger that socialism would become identified with anti-patriotism in the popular mind. Those who say that Keir Hardie died of a broken heart in 1915 may exaggerate, but he had cause for heartbreak.

Yet in 1918 the Labour Party took two long steps towards the status of a National party, capable of bidding for the right to govern Britain. Its more farsighted leaders understood the opportunities which the war gave Labour. The differences over policy had not been allowed to break up the party. Now a dual reform—of organization and of programme—prepared the basis for future progress. A new constitution was drafted, largely by Arthur Henderson and Sidney Webb. While it did not end the federal aspect of the party, it promoted the creation of local branches of the Labour Party, through which direct membership became possible for any individual voter without the necessity either of becoming a trade unionist or of joining one of the small, fervent socialist societies such as the ILP or the Fabians. The new constitution looked forward to a day when there would be a local party branch in every constituency, ready to compete with the older parties in their own terms.

It contained another innovation as well. Until 1918, the party's purpose, as expressed in its constitution, was simply "to organize and maintain in Parliament and the country a political Labour Party". Now the statement of purposes was greatly amplified, and included the famous clause:

> To secure for the producers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service.[1]

Thus the party was for the first time fully committed to socialism, although the word itself was still left unspoken.

The commitment was reinforced, in June of the same year, with the passage by the regular Party Conference of twenty-six resolutions based on Sidney Webb's manifesto, *Labour and the New Social Order*. These resolutions ranged over such diverse topics as Home Rule for Ireland and the demobilization of servicemen, but they included a hard core of socialist statement. The party declared in favour of land nationalization; of public ownership of the mines, railways, electric power production and life assurance immediately, and of canals, harbours and steamships eventually; of a general extension of the legal basic wage; of Governmental responsibility for preventing unemployment; of maintaining the war-time controls over industry; and of a programme of heavier taxation of the wealthy, including a capital levy on fortunes of £1,000 or more. Many a thorny question was passed over or touched lightly; most conspicuous of these was the issue of workers' control of industry, over which Guild Socialists and State Socialists were at loggerheads. But *Labour and the New Social Order*, for all that it did not always spell out the means of attaining its objectives, was a remarkable preview of the welfare state, as it evolved in the 1940's.

The reorganization of the Labour Party was too recent to have much effect on the outcome of Lloyd George's sudden and swift Coupon Election of 1918. There was a disappointingly small increase in numbers for the Labour Party in the House of Commons, from thirty-eight to fifty-nine Members. More important, the Parliamentary Party was shorn of its socialist leaders, because these had made themselves unpopular by opposing the war. What remained was a stolid and uninspiring group of ageing trade unionists, most of whom owed their

survival in the House to having satisfied the demands of orthodox patriotism.

Nevertheless, the war had prepared the ground into which the seed of the party reorganization was dropped. It had broken up old habits and ways of thought. It had given a massive demonstration of the country's dependence upon the efforts of the common people. It had made people feel an identity of interest, while exacting a rough equality of sacrifice. The Representation of the People Act of 1918, which achieved virtual manhood suffrage and made women eligible to vote for the first time for Parliament, reflected these changes. And even though Labour gained little by it at first, it was also prerequisite to the growth of the party beyond sectarian limits.

The war had also broken down old restraints upon the activities of the Government. The State had dared to interfere extensively in the workings of the economy. The redistribution of incomes, already aided by the New Dealism of the great Liberal Government of 1905–14, had continued.[2] All this made a powerful solvent for the pre-war prejudice against the notion of using political action to produce social change.

Labour stood to gain even more directly from the effects of the war on the established parties. Liberals and Conservatives alike were inextricably connected with the war and all its horrors, and soon became the victims of popular disillusionment with the peace, too. Labour, relatively clear of responsibility for these tragic events, could reap the benefits. Even more clearly to its advantage was the split, soon to become the disintegration, of the Liberal Party. By 1920, although the pacifist wing of the Labour Party was still unable to overcome its unpopularity sufficiently to get back into Parliament, the Labour patriots were already swinging around in their propaganda efforts to take advantage of the party's lack of responsibility for the war and the peace.[3] As in the Continental socialist movements, the pro-war majority was shifting towards what had been the minority view of the war.

The strength which these new factors gave to Labour was not immediately apparent in the post-war years, as the party struggled towards the goal, still fairly distant, of 100 Members

of Parliament. The results of the Coupon Election, following so closely upon the political hysteria of war-time, left the party's leaders themselves unsure that the new democracy would necessarily give Labour its chance. In 1920, Ramsay MacDonald concluded that Conservatism had found new strength in the democratic franchise: by controlling the press and other means of influencing mass opinion, Conservatives could exploit the "unawakened and subordinate minds" among the newly enfranchised.[4]

For a while, Henderson's patient work was obscured by the experiments with "direct action" that shifted Labour's attention from the inept Parliamentary Party to the trade unions. Not until 1921 did the failure of the Triple Alliance to support the miners in their lock-out remove for a time the menace of a general strike in Britain.

This "Black Friday" fiasco, combined with the end of the brief post-war boom, weakened the industrial arm of Labour; the fall of the Coalition and the General Election of 1922 gave the political arm its chance. The fruits of the 1918 reforms began to be apparent. Labour doubled its representation in the House, polled 4,250,000 votes, raised its proportion of the popular vote from 20.5 to 29.9 per cent, and established its claim to be considered His Majesty's Opposition. It also began to establish its claim to be a truly National party; for the first time, men of middle-class backgrounds were elected as Labour M.P.s.[5] At the same time, by what will seem a paradox only to those unacquainted with the solid conservatism of most British trade unionists, the personnel of the Parliamentary party became markedly more socialist. The war-time "pacifists", MacDonald, Snowden, Lansbury, Jowett, returned in strength, bringing with them their ex-Liberal allies, such as Charles Trevelyan and H. B. Lees-Smith. The domination by trade union-nominated Members was lessened; where in 1918 only 15.8 per cent came from Divisional Labour Parties and other non-trade union sponsors, the figure in 1922 was 40.1 per cent.[6] It was a broader and more imposing party that emerged from the 1922 election, and its victories were the sensation of the day.

This strengthened party was far from a solid unit, however.

More than a trace of its federal origins remained. "No party," wrote Lord Birkenhead not without malice, "since the Whig-Liberal Combines of the middle nineteenth century has been so heterogeneous as the present Socialist-Labour bloc."[7]

The trade unions were by far the greatest interest group. With their political levy, drawn from the entire membership of each affiliated union, they dominated party finance, while the bloc voting system enabled their delegates at the Party Conference to swamp the tens of thousands of active socialists with the votes of millions of more or less passive trade union members. This position of dominance they maintained with stolid tenacity; attempts to revise the voting arrangements at the Party Conference in favour of the Divisional Labour Parties and the socialist societies were fruitless. The 1918 reforms had, in fact, strengthened this domination, by removing the direct representation of the socialist societies on the National Executive. That the socialist societies continued to be generously represented on the Executive testifies to the tolerance and ability to compromise of the trade union leaders, and to their recognition, grudging though it might occasionally be, that the socialists provided the party with much needed vigour and enthusiasm. For their part, most trade unionists still saw the Labour Party chiefly as an organization for political support of the unions' legal rights, and for pushing certain concrete measures of material welfare—pensions, higher wages, unemployment benefits.

Among the top leaders of the Labour Party were several trade union veterans who appeared as moderate socialists, but whose view of their party was pretty much what has just been described. One was Arthur Henderson, the master organizer of the party, Labour member of Lloyd George's War Cabinet, a man of somewhat ponderous words and solid, uninspiring appearance, who possessed great qualities of loyalty, courage, and patience, and a deep streak of idealism which the casual observer might miss.[8] Poles apart from Henderson was the volatile railwaymen's leader, J. H. Thomas, of the small moustache, the almost too perfect Cockney accent, the love for sartorial splendour and jovial good fellowship. A clever nego-

tiator, he owed his position in the movement partly to his skill, and partly to the fact that he reflected so perfectly the instincts and interests of the average, unintellectual, not-too-earnest British working-man.[9] The third major Labour Party leader from the trade union side was J. R. Clynes, a neat, dignified, colourless little man, serious and hard-working, who had been Chairman of the Parliamentary Party until Ramsay MacDonald's return to Parliament in 1922. Defeated then by the more glamorous and much abler MacDonald, Clynes showed that quality most treasured in the Labour Party, an unswerving loyalty to the movement, by accepting the Deputy Leadership and rallying the party behind its new chief.[10]

The ILP, though numerically insignificant compared to the unions, continued to play a leading role in the larger party after 1918. In the ILP were gathered the more fiery advocates of a socialist millennium. Although not ideologues by Continental socialist standards, ILPers tended to be far more ideologically motivated than most British Labourites. Many of them had been reluctant to see the 1918 reform go through, partly because they realized that the local Labour parties would soon be rivals to the ILP in every sense. With the entire party pledged to socialism, and with local branches everywhere, open to all comers, would not the ILP lose its *raison d'être*? Such was eventually to be the case, but in the short run, pending the full development of the local Labour parties, the ILP continued not only to provide the movement with its most energetic and articulate propagandists, but to play a major part in policy formulation, especially in the field of foreign affairs.[11]

The ILP also gave to the Labour Party a disproportionate share of its leaders, including MacDonald, returned now from the isolation of his anti-war stand, and rising towards the peak of his turbulent career. Handsome, courteous, and gifted with a magnificent speaking voice, he had established himself as Labour's most formidable spokesman, both in Parliament and outside. His stand against the war endeared him to the Left; his steady support of Parliamentary and gradualist methods made him acceptable to the Right. In the brief period between his return to Parliament in 1922 and the advent of the Labour

Government, he worked hard and effectively to make the Parliamentary Labour Party a potent yet thoroughly Constitutional Opposition. His speeches were always more inspirational than analytical, but there was as yet little indication of the vagueness which, late in his career, sometimes bordered on incoherence. Nor had criticism of his aloofness yet become serious. In short, this proud, sensitive, courageous, and rather self-centred man was the natural leader of the Labour Party.[12]

Among the few who seem never to have thought so, however, was his leading ILP colleague, Philip Snowden, a partial cripple since youth, and possessed of the intolerant certitude of self which sometimes accompanies success in surmounting such a handicap. Snowden's mind was keen, although his intellectual powers were not quite as impressive as most Labourites took them to be. His viewpoint was too narrow, however, and his talents too specialized, for him to be a serious contender for the party leadership*—not to mention the fact that his wife, Ethel, was an outspoken and controversial figure, not entirely popular within the party.[13]

Among the other groups within the Labour Party, perhaps only the Fabian Society, then passing beyond its period of greatest influence within the movement, need be mentioned here. To the social gospel of the ILP the Fabians responded with social engineering. Sidney Webb, most prominent of the Fabian engineers, was not, perhaps, as important a figure in the Labour Party as "the Big Five". It is dangerous to take conspirators at their own evaluation, and there was always something self-consciously conspiratorial about the Webbs. Sidney was invaluable when a resolution needed drafting, or a form of words had to be found in which to express a compromise or cloak a disagreement. And, of course, he and his wife achieved true greatness as social researchers, outside the context of political party. But they had no base of popular support, got along badly with MacDonald, and had few intimate connexions with the other top leaders. Sidney, moreover, was not a success in Parliament, partly for the simple reason that he did not speak loudly enough to be heard.[14]

*But see below, p. 273.

To list the major elements in the Labour Party—trade unions, ILP, Fabians, local Labour parties—does not begin to convey the variety of viewpoint contained therein. It was a long gamut from the sturdy little ex-miner, Stephen Walsh, who had remained in Lloyd George's Coalition, even after the war, until virtually dragged from it by his constituents, and the fanatical left-wing firebrand, the Rev. Campbell Stephen, one of a whole platoon of Clydeside M.P.s whose fame as fomenters of rent strikes and civil disturbances sent shivers down bourgeois backs. Yet the Labour Party not only ran this gamut but contained a dozen other difficult alliances, between State Socialists and Guild Socialists; between Prohibitionists and the beer-drinking social clubs that were in many areas the backbone of the party; between leftish university dons like Hugh Dalton and ex-Tory, Churchly pacifists like Lord Parmoor; between planners inclined to worship order and efficiency, such as the Webbs, and fiery non-conformists, in the broadest sense, such as Colonel Josiah Wedgwood. One may well ask how a young party, already subject to the stresses and strains of rapid growth, could hope to hold together so strange a political menagerie as this.

If there was any worry concerning this divergence in aims, it came from the socialists. Thus a booklet by "Seven Members of the Labour Party" warned against excessive preoccupation with "the palliatives of present misery; we should always take care lest they should hamper our progress towards our final aims, and still more, lest they themselves should become our objectives".[15] But such doubts were seldom voiced and easily quieted, for the socialist commonwealth was still a long distance away, and even the party's ability to introduce these palliatives was not yet a reality. Besides it was comfortingly easy to smooth over divergences in viewpoint, or the rough edges of an excessive preoccupation with material ends, by an appeal to moral sentiments. Labour's propaganda retained its marked evangelical flavour. Philip Snowden was met, on his first visit to his birthplace after becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer, by the local Temperance Brass Band, and escorted to the United Methodist schoolroom by the whole population. That practical architect

of the party organization, Arthur Henderson, was a Methodist lay preacher. As for Ramsay MacDonald, he combined moral idealism with great charismatic qualities in a mixture that was devastatingly effective in making the rank and file forget their differences. One admirer wrote:

> The plain man had a conviction that Mr. MacDonald was somehow different from other politicians; the more sophisticated were aware in him of an odd and haunting power of connecting the human landscape with the quiet of the sky . . . a man of fearless rectitude, with the purity and the comprehensive charity of the good. . . . From other politicians he was distinguished by something like a halo.[16]

Probably Labour's success in 1922 was due not so much to anything its leaders said, however, as to the fact that the working classes, or a large section of them, had become conscious of their political strength and wanted their own party. But it does not follow that the working class Labourites were unwilling to accept a leadership partly composed of middle and upper class persons. A German observer was amazed to see the warm greeting given Oswald Mosley and his wife (Lord Curzon's daughter) when they attended their first Labour rally in 1924, shortly after the Labour Government came into office.[17] He need not have been. Attempts to make the Labour Party an exclusively trade union, and therefore working class, body had failed several times, most recently in 1914. Moreover, the class consciousness of British Labour, in so far as it existed, was distinctly non-Marxian. As MacDonald summed it up:

> The true separation in society is the moral and economic line of division between the producer and non-producer, between those who possess without serving and those who serve, whereas the separation between the professional classes and labour has made the line of division a purely psychological one which is not without its reason in the different modes of life of the two classes, but which nevertheless is mischievous and ought to be obliterated.[18]

Two things stand out in this view. One is that the vast

majority of the population are members of the working class by this definition.* The other is that class antagonism along traditional socialist lines, which might have threatened the internal unity of the Labour Party, is expressly deplored in the latter half of the statement, and robbed of its theoretical basis by the first half.

Some class tensions undoubtedly existed within the party. These often took the form of conflict between trade unionists and intellectuals. The latter were indispensable, if Labour were ever to govern, and the movement, to a greater or lesser extent, understood this. But the prejudice kept cropping up. One who considered himself its victim wrote:

> What the average labour leader as the average rank and filer wants is the "safe" man—the moderate man, the man he can "understand", that is, the man who doesn't make him think. The movement today wants men who can talk platitudes . . . [and not a man] who drags them from the hog-trough of votes and resolutions, in which they wallow, to show them something of the vision of life.[19]

Anti-intellectualism did some real damage to the party's efficiency as a political fighting machine, although not as much as the intellectuals would have us think. There has often been a complaint that the Labour benches in Parliament tend to groan beneath the weight of retired Trade Union Secretaries, phlegmatic and unimaginative. MacDonald wrote, more tactfully, of "men chosen by Trade Unions from officials financed by their Unions, but whose training does not fit them to be efficient Members of Parliament".[20] But one may ask if these uninspiring M.P.s were any more of a drag upon the Labour Party's efficiency, at least after 1922, than were the alternate ranks of minor business men and major landowners who occupied so many of the Conservative benches an obstacle to Tory achievement. Anti-intellectualism may have had more serious effects in other areas; G. D. H. Cole, himself a veteran Labour intellectual, has criticized the party for "a failure to appreciate

*And surely a great proportion of the non-producers would be found, on examination, to be worthy widows and pensioners, for whom the Labour Party entertained only the tenderest feelings.

brains and a distrust of 'cleverness' "; one of the results, he maintains, has been that Labour's propagandist literature was, until recently, extraordinarily dull in style and presentation.[21]

Yet, whatever divisions arose in the Labour Party of these years, whether of persons, groups, or programme, the sense of unity of the movement was able to transcend them. A feeling that they were the chosen people helped here, and was actually intensified by the excesses of their opponents. The more Labour was accused of being subversive or unpatriotic, the more its partisans felt like a band of brothers. When MacDonald was attacked as "the undoubted herald of a Communist army",[22] the only effect on his followers was to make them forget that they might have doubted his wisdom during the war, and to make them feel that he, and they with him, were not as other men. The combination of some degree of persecution from without with overtones of religious fervour from within was a potent one. The fervour had declined somewhat by 1924; to recapture Philip Snowden at his most evangelical, the ILP was forced to resurrect and reprint a pamphlet first published in 1908, in which he had written:

> Socialism will justify God's way to man. . . . Socialism comes as an Angel of Light bearing to mankind this message of truth. . . . And now we know that suffering, misery, and poverty are a violation of God's will; now we know that the fullness of time has come for us to cast the last relic of our fallen nature from us and to follow the beckoning angel who is waiting to lead us back through the gates of Paradise into an Eden of intellectual joys.[23]

But even in 1924, the Messianic spirit, fed by a consciousness of self-sacrifice, survived in many Labour breasts. Ben Turner, M.P., wrote, upon the advent of the first Labour Government:

> For thirty years of my life as an agitator, I, like others, never had more than £2 a week, for twenty years 30*s* a week, and every week some of it went for literature, propaganda, and subscriptions to movements and causes. The sacrifice of the women was the greatest; and to the dead ones Praise, to the living ones Honour. The Movement is mighty. It has won Office. It will soon win Power.

> It possesses a Soul. It has a Mission. It embodies the Religion of Love and the Glory of Life.[24]

Francis Williams has said that the party's socialism was "a matter much more of general philosophic principle untranslated (and indeed without clearer definition untranslatable) into concrete achievement than one of actual programme."[25] With MacDonald, at least, this was intentional. A programme, he wrote, "is generally the least effective part of a candidate's equipment". Programmes are in a constant state of flux; they are meaningless except in the context of a given situation. The voters would do better to consider "the political group with which he [the candidate] associates and his own general outlook, together with the equipment of mind and character which he wishes to place at their disposal".[26]

Far from viewing the lack of exact definitions of their socialism as a sign of impractical idealism, Labourites were inclined to see it as proof that they were not mere theorists; what P. J. Dollan said of the ILP might equally well have applied to Labour in general:

> Your theorist is always missing opportunities because he has deluded himself that events must work out according to his theory. He is the most unpractical of men. . . . The ILP is practicable [*sic*] and adaptable because it is idealistic and humanitarian rather than theoretical and abstract. The ILP is guided by its heart rather than by text-books and therefore does the right thing at the right time.[27]

Of course it is not difficult to find other, perhaps less conscious motives for this calculated vagueness of doctrine. A movement composed largely of working people with limited education is likely to stress the value of stout hearts and sound common sense as compared with the frills and deceptions of intellectual parlour tricks. But there were elements of the party who were moving in the direction of greater precision of thought —or at least were recognizing the need for such a move. Harry Roberts's booklet, published by the party in 1923, deplored the fact that Labour had "taken over from the Liberals their pious

habit of worshipping words without attaching any meaning to them", and maintained that few of the party's leaders "seem to have realized that the work of criticism is nearly accomplished —that the time for construction has come".[28] The ILP report on socialist agricultural policy, although on balance it scarcely came down on the side of concreteness and practicality, did take significant steps in that direction. It stressed the need for an "inner change in the farmers' outlook", as well as an "outward change in the ownership of his acres"; it made definite efforts to counteract the old Labour tendency, dating back to Henry George's day, to reduce all the problems of agriculture to a question of rent; it cited the bad results in eastern Europe of an excessive emphasis on the issue of land ownership to the neglect of technical and organizational problems, and asserted that "public ownership is not an end in itself".[29]

But these were still relatively small voices, compared with the great chorus of generalities, some scarcely more than day-dreams, which often passed for definition of Labour's socialist aims. MacDonald, despite his strictures on those who would produce programmes instead of relying upon mind and character, did attempt in 1920 to set forth the contents of a King's Speech for a hypothetical Labour Government taking office the next day. Of the thirteen pages devoted to this, just half deal with domestic affairs. Of these six and one-half pages, three consist of rambling remarks on the subject of reforming the institution of Parliament, as preventive medicine against the threat of Direct Action. There was just over a page concerning measures that could be described as socialist; nationalization received one paragraph of less than half a page. A fair sample of the rest is:

> But the offices in Whitehall would hum with a new industry. The administration of Labour would be as new as its legislation. Its influence, exerted in a thousand different ways, would be to advance liberty, to set people on their feet, to give Labour responsibility, to produce the citizen of robust mind and of faithful service, to curb the powers that do injustice in the State and that exploit and break men. [30]

A party in which this could pass muster as a definition of programme clearly placed great reliance upon the character and abilities of its leaders. Perhaps this contributed to the great emphasis in the Labour Party upon personal loyalty. That observant veteran of Continental socialism, Egon Wertheimer, recognized this, and considered that it gave an additional strength to the movement, not enjoyed by its companion parties abroad. It also gave to the party a flexibility that was indispensable, even though in the 1931 crisis it made the Labour Party more vulnerable than it might otherwise have been to the shock of its leaders' "treachery".

The fact remains that Labour was still, on the eve of its accession to office in 1924, a propagandist party. If any further proof of this is needed, one need only turn once more to MacDonald's "King's Speech", in which the very core of the section on domestic reforms is an effort to "give opportunity for maintaining many of those small 'peasant' and hand industries which alone can surround people with individuality and distinction". "Individual production," he continued, "can be crushed out by mechanical factory production only in a poverty-stricken community where the exigencies of price are so great that the desire for happiness in use cannot be considered."[31] What relation does this Utopia bear to the Fabian doctrine, as expounded by Philip Snowden:

> It is this co-operative or collective method of production which has destroyed the logic of the individual ownership of the instruments of production. No individual can now claim the finished article as the product of his own labour. . . . The system of production is now co-operative, and must be so if the great advantages of machinery and production upon an extensive scale are to be secured. . . . Socialism aims at reconciling the production of wealth and the ownership of the means of production by which it is produced. As the work of production is co-operative, so must the ownership of the means of production be co-operative.[32]

Was the "collective method of production" the foundation of socialism, or its enemy, marked for destruction? That two such

mutually contradictory views could exist side by side within the movement, without causing the slightest comment or feeling of inconsistency, suggests that the propagandist stage had not yet been passed. Neither Snowden's theoretical generalizations nor MacDonald's idyllic atavism were likely to be of much help in tackling the problems which both men were to face as a result of the strange workings of the British electoral system in December 1923.

NOTES

[1]Labour Party Constitution (1918), Art. III(d). The constitutions of 1914 and 1918 are reproduced in G. D. H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), pp. 71–81.

[2]See A. L. Bowley, *Some Economic Consequences of the Great War* (London, 1930), Ch. VI.

[3]See, e.g., J. H. Thomas, *When Labour Rules* (London, 1920), *passim.*

[4]*A Policy for the Labour Party* (London, 1920), p. 53. See also Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The Decay of Capitalist Civilisation* (London, 1923), pp. 176–7.

[5]Clement R. Attlee, *The Labour Party in Perspective—And Twelve Years Later* (London, 1949), p. 46.

[6]Derived from Cole, *History of the Labour Party*, p. 128.

[7]*Contemporary Personalities* (London, 1924), p. 233.

[8]See Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson, A Biography* (London, 1938), and, esp. for his later career, Henry R. Winkler, "Arthur Henderson", in *The Diplomats, 1919–39*, ed. Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, 1953).

[9]There is no adequate Life. His autobiography, *My Story* (London, 1937), is inaccurate and superficial, though unintentionally revealing. See references to Thomas in other works, such as Snowdon's *Autobiography*, Beatrice Webb's *Diaries*.

[10]Again, his *Memoirs*, 2 vols. (London, 1937) are of rather slight value. For the 1922 episode see esp. R. T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties* (London, 1955), pp. 347–52, and Emanuel Shinwell, *Conflict Without Malice* (London, 1955), pp. 83–84.

[11]W. P. Maddox, *Foreign Relations in British Labour Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), pp. 118, 202–4.

[12]The best study, Lord Elton's *Life* (London, 1939), ends with 1919. See also H. Hessell Tiltman, *Ramsay MacDonald: Labor's Man of Destiny* (New York, 1929); M. A. Hamilton, *J. Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1929); Jacques Bardoux, *J. Ramsay MacDonald* (Paris, 1924); and L. MacNeill Weir's polemical *Tragedy of Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1938). Among the more acute of

many sketches of MacDonald are those in M. A. Hamilton, *Remembering My Good Friends* (London, 1944); John Buchan (Lord Tweedsmuir), *Memory Hold - the-Door* (London, 1940); and Sir James A. Salter, *Personality in Politics* (London, 1947). Benjamin Sacks, *J. Ramsay MacDonald in Thought and Action* (Albuquerque, N.M., 1952) is useful for bibliographies of MacDonald's writings, and as a kind of manual of his views.

[13]Philip Snowden (Viscount Snowden), *An Autobiography*, 2 vols. (London, 1934) is very valuable; studies by Bechofer Roberts and by A. Andreades are less so. See also Sir Percy James Grigg, *Prejudice and Judgment* (London, 1948). For a harsh comment on Ethel Snowden, see *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1956), p. 3.

[14]Beatrice Webb, *Our Partnership*, ed. Barbara Drake and Margaret Cole (London, 1948); her *Diaries, 1912–24*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1952), and *1924–32*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1956). See also M. Cole (ed.), *The Webbs and Their Work* (London, 1949), specialized essays by various writers.

[15]*The Labour Party's Aim* (London, 1923), pp. 13–14.

[16]M. A. Hamilton, *J. Ramsay MacDonald*, p. 249.

[17]Egon Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party*, 2nd ed. (London, 1930), preface, pp. x–xii.

[18]*Policy for the Labour Party*, p. 38.

[19]Shaw Desmond, *Labour: the Giant with the Feet of Clay* (London, 1921), pp. 152–3.

[20]*Policy for the Labour Party*, p. 31.

[21]Cole, *History*, pp. 123–4.

[22]"A Gentleman with a Duster" (Harold Begbie), *The Windows of Westminster* (New York, 1924), p. viii.

[23]*The Individual Under Socialism* (London, 1908), p. 8.

[24]*Socialist Review*, Jan. 1924, p. 72.

[25]*Journal of Politics*, XII (May 1950), 189.

[26]*Policy for the Labour Party*, pp. 160–1.

[27]*Socialist Review*, May 1924, p. 227.

[28]*England: A National Policy for Labour* (London, 1923), pp. 23, 16.

[29]ILP Agricultural Committee, *A Socialist Policy for Agriculture* (London, 1924).

[30]*Policy for the Labour Party*, p. 174.

[31]ibid., p. 163.

[32]*The Economic Case for Socialism* (London, 192–), pp. 13–14.

II

THE ELECTION OF 1923: THE CONSERVATIVES

"Suicide during a fit of temporary insanity"

Philip Snowden[1]

The year 1923 began with Bonar Law as Prime Minister of the first Conservative Government since 1905, a Government that marched (or perhaps one should say sat) beneath the banner inscribed "Tranquillity". The election of 1922 had given the Ministry a commanding majority in the House of Commons, and left the Opposition deeply divided: there were 347 Conservatives, 142 Labour, sixty-four orthodox Liberals under Asquith, and fifty-three National Liberals under Lloyd George.[2] The Tories had their divisions, too, most notably between those who had voted at the famous Carlton Club meeting to end the Lloyd George Coalition, and their opponents, the Austen Chamberlainite minority. The latter were not the kind of men to seek revenge by upsetting the Government, however. There was no reason why Conservatives should not have looked confidently forward to a full term of five years in power—time enough for mapping the strategy to hold in check the Labour Party, which had almost doubled its Parliamentary representation in the shadow, so to speak, of the Tory success.

Yet by the year's end Bonar Law was dead, the Conservative majority in Parliament was shattered, and the Government faced imminent extinction. Tranquillity had vanished, and in its place fell the hated, feared, and above all, unexpected shadow of a Labour Government, the first in Britain.

The course of events in the first three-quarters of the year scarcely serves to explain so startling a reversal of political fortunes. True, the Government found several stubborn problems blocking its path, chief among them the crisis in Europe precipitated by the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr; the evil of unemployment, then beginning to seem a permanent

feature of the post-war landscape; and the continuing housing shortage. Yet something had been achieved in housing, by the passage of Neville Chamberlain's Act, and by autumn it began to seem that perhaps the long tangle of Reparations was about to be cleared and the road to European pacification opened. Unemployment remained, but at least had not increased during the year.

One striking change there had been. Bonar Law, fatally ill, had resigned in May, and Stanley Baldwin, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had succeeded him at the head of the reconstituted Ministry. He had played a leading part at the Carlton Club meeting that ended the Coalition. Since then his chief claim to fame was his settlement of the War Debt to the United States, which was not especially favourable to Britain, to put it mildly, but which served as proof that her standards of honour were unimpaired, and her confidence in her own economic future still strong.

The debt settlement serves well to introduce the new Prime Minister. For Baldwin was, first and foremost, an honourable man. Everyone agreed that he was unusually honest, modest, and well-meaning, especially for a politician. He cannot have been unaware that his political strength lay in the public image of him as a pipe-smoking, pig-fancying, plain-faced ordinary man. This image was in fact much oversimplified, although Baldwin need not be charged with insincerity on that account. The ordinary man, practising the ordinary virtues, but summoned to a position in society in which such virtues appear extraordinary—such was the self-portrait which Stanley Baldwin sought to give to himself and to the world. Its appeal to the public should not be underrated; no doubt many a sensible, everyday sort of chap found it flattering to see one of his own kind (for so it appeared), guiding the course of Empire from Downing Street. As Lord Derby said, with every intention of praising his chief, Baldwin was "a man trained in his [Bonar Law's] school of straightforwardness—of businessmen dealing with business questions in the direct way that every businessman wished to deal with his own business".[3]

But such virtues are not always enough. Bereft of the most

brilliant and eminent Conservatives—the Austen Chamberlains, Robert Hornes, Birkenheads—the Cabinet was ordinary enough. The only men of outstanding ability were the ageing Marquess of Curzon, whose brilliance was not of the popular kind, and Neville Chamberlain, whose career as a National politician was just beginning. Nor could Chamberlain, Birmingham businessman that he was, lend the necessary dash of colour to offset Mr. Baldwin's solid but unspectacular virtues.

Still, the lack of distinction of the Baldwin Cabinet hardly explains its swift downfall. When the Conservatives met in their Annual Conference in October, there was no reason to expect any startling developments; the first such affair following a successful General Election is not a likely place for them. There had been rumours that the Cabinet was considering protective tariffs as a remedy for unemployment, and the Labour Party had just launched a major campaign on the unemployment issue. Yet it is safe to say that the Prime Minister's address to the delegates at Plymouth on 25 October 1923, took the nation by surprise. It also set in motion a train of events that led within three months to the accession to office of the first Labour Government.

The Conference had been unexciting, marked chiefly by the leadership's efforts to calm the ardours of loudly Francophil delegates out to commit the party to a policy more hostile to Germany in the Ruhr, when the Prime Minister appeared. His speech dealt mainly with the question of unemployment. After describing the difficulties of Britain's position, he brought up the pledge against protective tariffs given by his predecessor during the electoral campaign of 1922.:

> Mr. Bonar Law's pledge, given a year ago, was that there should be no fundamental change in the fiscal arrangements of the country. That pledge binds me, and in this Parliament there will be no fundamental change, and I take these words strictly. I am not a man to play with a pledge. (Cheers.) But I cannot see myself that any slight extension or adoption of principles hitherto sanctioned in the Legislature is a breach of that pledge. But at any time

> that I am challenged I am always willing to take a verdict. . . . I have for myself come to the conclusion that . . . if we go pottering along as we are we shall have grave unemployment with us to the end of time. And I have come to the conclusion myself that the only way of fighting this subject is by protecting the home market. (Loud and continued cheering.) I am not a clever man. I know nothing of political tactics, but I will say this: Having come to that conclusion myself, I felt the only honest and right thing as a leader of a democratic party was to tell them, at the first opportunity I had, what I thought, and submit it to their judgement. (Cheers.)[4]

Now it is difficult to judge, from these words, although they are the operative words of the speech, whether or not Baldwin intended to precipitate a General Election by them. Certainly the promise that he would not break Bonar Law's pledge, that "in this Parliament there will be no fundamental change", would have little meaning if "this Parliament" were on the verge of being dissolved. Apparently some "slight extension or adoption of principles hitherto sanctioned in the Legislature" was to come first; an election, fought on the issue of a general protective tariff, was to come later. All this was on condition, however, that no one challenged his interpretation of the pledge. And this brings us back to our starting point, for it is difficult, not to say uncharitable, to assume that Baldwin was so unskilled a politician as not to have foreseen the inevitable result of reopening the tariff issue, especially at a time when the divided Liberals were in desperate need of a rallying point. Nor do Baldwin's protestations of political innocence allay one's suspicions as to his ingenuousness here. Rather they seem to indicate embarrassment. This is not surprising, for he had already been given indications that his *démarche* would meet with hesitations, bewilderment, even dismay, within his party. The Cabinet had apparently been consulted only briefly, two days before the Plymouth speech.[5] At that time some of his colleagues, disturbed by the policy and even more so by the prospect of an early election, exacted a most unorthodox and in fact unworkable pledge from the Prime Minister: that he

would make his advocacy of protection a purely personal statement, not *ex officio*.[6]

Baldwin's ambiguity only made a muddled situation worse. Protectionists worried lest the Government go to the country before it had had time fully to work out its tariff policy. Austen Chamberlain voiced such fears in correspondence with his brother Neville, then Chancellor of the Exchequer. W. A. S. Hewins, who was among those called in *after* the Plymouth speech to help develop a tariff policy, describes in his memoirs the shock and consternation of his group at the announcement, on 13 November, that there would be an immediate Dissolution, with polling on 6 December. "I do not know precisely how this decision came about," wrote Hewins. "It was at variance with all that I had heard, and it made the Tariff Advisory Committee ridiculous."[7]

Tory Free Traders were equally aghast. Alderman Salvidge and Lord Derby, being the ones who would carry the brunt of the fight in traditionally free trade Lancashire, tried vainly, at a luncheon at Lord Derby's country house, to get Baldwin to discuss strategy; the Premier preferred to discourse on the growing of raspberries. This lunch followed a rally in the Manchester Free Trade Hall, on 2 November, at which Baldwin outlined his programme, and Derby reassured his followers that "There was no question of an immediate election; there would be time for reflection." The Noble Lord went on to make a brave attempt at political tightrope walking: "I have been, I still am, a Free Trader (cheers), but at the same time I have never been a bigoted Free Trader (cheers), and I hope and trust that amongst Free Traders there are many like myself who feel that exceptional circumstances require exceptional treatment."[8]

Such a delicate balance became next to impossible, however, and the Unionist Free Trader's dilemma reached the crisis stage at the time of the General Election announcement. In fact, 12 to 14 November must have been among the most trying days in the lives of several prominent Tories, including both Baldwin and Derby. On the 12th the Prime Minister made an attempt to reunite his party, by enlisting the support of the

Coalition Conservatives, under Austen Chamberlain and Lord Birkenhead, with the promise that they would be brought into the Government, after the election. Chamberlain and Birkenhead demurred, on the grounds that they could not accept such probationary status, but ought to be brought in immediately. This demand ran into insurmountable resistance to Birkenhead from several junior ministers and from the top officials of the party organization, and the scheme had to be dropped on 14 November. In the interim, however, Chamberlain and Birkenhead, though not members of the Government, had actually done the Prime Minister the considerable service of persuading Lord Derby and the Duke of Devonshire, whose discomfort over the sudden election had reached a climax, not to resign in protest. Even after the collapse of Baldwin's scheme for their inclusion in the Ministry, Chamberlain and Birkenhead went on to support the Government on the hustings.[9]

During the campaign, Baldwin stuck to his story: he had turned to protection as the only way out of the unemployment problem; he had not intended an election at this time, but had been forced into it by the clamour of his opponents, the Liberals and Labour.[10] But he had told Chamberlain and Birkenhead, on 12 November, that one of his purposes in precipitating an election was the reuniting of the party: by fighting side by side the Coalition and anti-Coalition Conservatives could, he hoped, heal their breach and return to rule together. Something similar was implied in his speech to the Constitutional Club in January 1925.[11] Since he had already made (and badly bungled) one attempt to bring the Coalitionist Tories back into the fold, at the time of his assuming the Premiership,[12] there is no reason to doubt that some such motive was in Baldwin's mind.

Perhaps, too, he was genuinely afraid that Lloyd George, who was making a North American tour in the autumn of 1923, would celebrate his return to Britain by coming out for protection, as part of a new programme for strengthening the Empire and recouping the Lloyd Georgian political fortunes. At least so Baldwin told Dr. Thomas Jones long afterwards, maintaining that he had prevented a possible reunion of Lloyd George with the Coalition Conservatives by thus beating "the Goat" to the

punch.[13] Rumour was rife at the time that Lloyd George was contemplating some such surprise; his latest biographer maintains that the Wizard had "substantially agreed with [Lord] Beaverbrook, in a number of confidential conversations, that some form of Empire economic union was the necessary policy of tomorrow."[14] On the other hand, Lloyd George was already thinking of Liberal reunion, rather than creation of a Centre Party, and had shown his willingness, in the spring of 1923, to join the Asquithians in the defence of unadulterated free trade.[15] Still, Baldwin disliked and distrusted Lloyd George; his own general feeling that the Government he had inherited from Bonar Law was not as strong as it might be, either as to personnel or policy, may well have been accentuated by some nervousness apropos of the Welshman's next move.* Probably no simple, clear-cut explanation of Baldwin's action can be given. A mind such as his, Wickham Steed decided, "defies exact analysis". "Thinking, with him, was not a definite process, but rather the gradual subconscious maturing of vague impressions towards some sudden instinctive conclusion," wrote Amery. "He was not a man addicted to intellectual analysis," adds Sir Harold Nicolson. "He regarded logical processes as un-English: he preferred to rely upon instinct, and would sniff and snuff at problems like an elderly spaniel."[16]

A letter of Neville Chamberlain's, dated 11 November 1923, attributes Baldwin's behaviour to shrewdness:

> He is not so simple as he makes out. . . . He has sprung a protectionist policy on the country almost at a moment's notice, with a Cabinet a substantial proportion of which consists of Free Traders. Not one of them has resigned, and the time when they could effectively have done so has already passed. The die-hards and Austen vie with one another in urging him to be more extreme. . . . Yet they all say that they will support him. At the same time he has anchored the thing on to unemployment. . . .

*Neville Chamberlain wrote in October 1927: ". . . if we had not gone for T.R. in 1923, Ll.G. would have done so and the Conservative Party would have been out for years." Cited in K. Feiling, *Life of Neville Chamberlain*, p. 108, note.

> He has definitely separated Ll. G. from the ex-Cabinet ministers.[17]

This was written, however, just before the absurd failure of the negotiations between Baldwin and "the ex-Cabinet ministers"; surely their support could have been purchased at far less price than an election, much less an election defeat. Politicians without a party are men deprived of the tools of their trade, and the mere fact that such strong support was forthcoming from these men, despite the failure of their negotiations with Baldwin and the very tepid nature of his tariff programme, shows how gentle a tug was required to draw them back to orthodox Conservatism.

As an attempt to end Britain's long allegiance to free trade, and thus to succeed where Joseph Chamberlain had failed, the Baldwin strategy was abortive. Once again, there was little planning and less political foresight. On 11 October, when Neville Chamberlain first told his brother that the Government was considering a policy of tariff reform, nothing definite had been decided. This is clear from the tone of Austen's reply: ". . . if you make up your minds that you are going to move in that direction [i.e. towards protection]—or even if you think that you are likely to move in that direction . . .", and so on.[18] Austen was full of warnings about the need for careful preparation of the ground before any public declaration was made. Yet Baldwin, and the few whom he took into his confidence—Neville Chamberlain, Lloyd Graeme (later Viscount Swinton), Amery—seem to have imagined that he could announce his conversion to protection before any such groundwork had been done, before the specific measures for implementing the policy had been developed, before ascertaining whether or not the Free Traders could be retained in harness, or the ex-Cabinet ministers returned to it—and that the Opposition would allow this all to be done in peace and at leisure, as if in some kind of gentlemanly intermission in the game of politics.*

*See Amery, *My Political Life*, II (London, 1953), 281–2. Neville Chamberlain hoped for an eighteen-month "educative campaign" before taking the issue to the polls. (His diary, 10 Oct. 1923, cited in Feiling, pp. 108–9.) Feiling says that Baldwin at first favoured an immediate Dissolution, then changed his mind, and then swung back to his original view.

The Opposition, however, had no choice but to fight. Even had its leaders been willing to use the Prime Minister's ambiguities at Plymouth as an excuse for delay or inaction, they were confronted with more pointed challenges such as Neville Chamberlain's, delivered to an overflow meeting at the same spot: "But if we are to deal adequately with the situation of unemployment next winter, then it will be necessary that we should ask to be released from that pledge, and that we should regard this situation with an open mind and a free hand, that we should take up the only weapon by which we can give adequate protection to our own people."[19]

Labour was first to respond. Arthur Henderson may have intended to force the Tories to give battle when he said in a speech at Yeovil on 26 October, "Mr. Baldwin throws down a challenge of protection as against the Labour policy. That challenge we accept."[20] Other Labourites followed Henderson's lead. On the 28th, J. H. Thomas implied that Baldwin should have his election immediately; on 1 November, MacDonald, just back from a tour of the Near East, attacked the new Tory policy with vigour in a well publicized London speech.[21]

As for the Liberals, their responses may have been delayed by a mere lack of major speeches scheduled for that week, or by Lloyd George's absence, or by a certain incredulity that the fates could be so kind to their party. The *Liberal Magazine* for November doubted that there would be an election soon, unless the Government "had completely taken leave of its senses". But Lloyd George seized the first opportunity, provided by eager journalists who met the *Mauretania* as it docked, to lash out at the Baldwin proposals, and open the door to Liberal reunion. On 13 November, a conference attended by Lloyd George, Asquith, Sir John Simon and Sir Alfred Mond (later Lord Melchett) ended the Liberal schism, at least formally, and a united party went forth to battle under Asquith's leadership. So easily was Liberal reunion achieved that some of the more ingenious Labour publicists suggested that Baldwin's whole purpose had been to aid in the regeneration of Liberalism, so as to defeat Labour, the one party that really menaced the vested interests.[22]

Meanwhile, Baldwin had announced the impending Dissolution to his startled Cabinet, a majority of whose members had argued against an immediate election just a few days earlier. Apparently the tactical advice of the Tory Party organization leaders had proven decisive.[23]

The policy upon which Stanley Baldwin elected to fight was not protection in the old Joseph Chamberlain tradition. As it emerged in the six-point programme outlined by the Prime Minister at Manchester on 2 November, it was a narrowly restricted field that was to be fenced in by the new tariffs; he proposed

1. To put a tax on manufactured goods, with special regard to those imports that cause the greatest amount of unemployment among you people.
2. To give a substantial preference to our Dominions.
3. To put no tax on wheat or meat.
4. As I said at Plymouth, I am having investigated most carefully now the best way in which we can offer help to agriculture to maintain the tillage of the nation.
5. To examine and co-ordinate and improve the existing schemes of insurance, adjust those evils that affect the life and health of the people such as old age and health and unemployment.
6. To develop our estates—our Empire.[24]

It may be observed that only the first two points dealt directly with protection; the third was negative; the rest were vague to the point of meaninglessness (how does one "adjust evils"?), although the fourth eventually bore fruits in the form of a proposed subsidy for arable land.*

The limitations and qualifications, it may seem, came close to obscuring the basic issue entirely. The fact is that Baldwin was threading his way gingerly among the various conflicting interests and points of view in his party and in the nation. The promise not to tax wheat or meat was exacted by the Tory free Traders; without it, there is little doubt that they would have bolted. As it was, an agonized meeting of Lancashire Tory M.P.s was reported willing to accept the announced policy, but

*See below, pp. 28, 34.

determined to make it clear that they would consult their constituents again if at any time it was broadened into full protection.[25] So much for Neville Chamberlain's "free hand"!

In order to appease these tender consciences, and avoid alienating like-minded voters across the land, the Conservative campaign devoted much time to careful expositions of the limits and qualifications upon the proposed tariffs. But to do this exclusively would mean scrapping whatever positive value protection had as a policy. So side by side with the reassurances went the old standard arguments applicable to a full-fledged system of tariffs. Baldwin himself devoted most of his major speeches to general protectionist arguments. Tariffs would save Britain from the competition of European countries with depreciated currencies; they would lead to a better balance of the British economy and thus, by making the country less dependent upon agricultural imports, make it less seriously affected by the slump in world trade. Sometimes he overlooked the fact that he had promised not to levy tariffs on the items crucial to any system of Imperial Preference, wheat and meat, and spoke glowingly of "one great Empire with Free Trade within its borders, and every part regarding itself as one nation, one land, one home".[26]

Besides all this, tariff reform was to produce all sorts of attractive by-products. First, soon added to the programme, was the proposal of a new agricultural subsidy to reward the cultivator of arable land; this was to compensate for the omission of basic agricultural products from the list of goods to be protected, and was to be paid for out of the proceeds of the tariffs on other goods. Then, Baldwin told a Lancashire audience of another use for which the tariff revenues were destined: "It is an integral part of my policy to devote a portion of the new revenue to pushing ahead in development [of cotton-growing in the Empire] as it has never been done before."[27] And Ronald McNeill extended the list to include reduction and, he hoped, eventual abolition of "existing duties on such things as tea, tobacco, sugar, and possibly beer".[28] As the *Nation* unkindly pointed out, McNeill was promising to raise about £230 million from just over £200 million of manufactured imports,

a good portion of which tariffs were supposed to keep out in the first place.

At the same time, and with increasing vehemence as the campaign wore on and Liberal and Labour attacks began to tell, the Tories reminded the voters that this was a new, limited kind of protection which they were proposing. Baldwin wrote an open letter to the chairman of the Women's Unionist Organization, to answer charges that his was a "dear food" policy; he argued that protection would cheapen food by encouraging home and Empire production, and would enable people to buy it by helping to cure unemployment. The Unionist Central Office sent out a circular, listing items that Mr. Baldwin was not going to tax (apples [Empire grown], tinned salmon [Empire], etc.), and promising reductions of duty on tea and sugar.[29] And if all this was not enough, there was always one last lure for Free Traders—the Conservative manifesto's promise "To utilize these duties in order to negotiate for a reduction of foreign tariffs in those directions which would most benefit our export trade".[30]

After such efforts to appease Free Traders and protectionists with different aspects of the same programme, the Tories left themselves open to satire such as A. A. Milne's version of a Conservative leaflet, which explained

> how the things are all kept out so as to protect British labour, and then all come in so as to pay our taxes for us, and how we let the things in free from Australia so as not to compete with the home markets; and all about Retaliation, which means that when a duty has protected British labour, and paid all our taxes, and encouraged the Empire, then it can be used as a weapon to frighten other nations.[31]

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that much of the Tory campaigning was done in very general and derivative terms, linking protection with patriotism, national strength, and a kind of cosy insularity, in such a way that the actual facts concerning duties on non-imperial tinned salmon would not matter very much. Here is Baldwin at the Queen's Hall, just after the Dissolution of Parliament:

> Is it not possible for knowledge, experience, and resources to prescribe treatment for this form of pernicious anaemia which has invaded the body politic [i.e. unemployment]? The prescription on which I am going to speak to you for a short time this afternoon is a very simple one—keep the home fires burning. (Cheers.) In this distressful time of the world's history voices reach our ears from all the distressed countries and the distressed people of the world. But the voice which is loudest in my ears is the voice of our own people. (Cheers.) It does so day and night and I shall not shrink from my task until I have found an answer for them. (Cheers.) . . .
>
> We import a great deal that we can make at home just as cheaply. . . . Our manufacturers are inferior to none in this world, (cheers) and the same is indisputably true of our workmen. (Renewed cheers.)[32]

Why, he asked, since the home trade (commerce within Britain) exceeded foreign trade in volume, should his opponents be "obsessed . . . in talking only of our trade in terms of foreign trade", thus conveying the idea that those who insisted upon discussing foreign trade in a debate on tariffs were being in some way unpatriotic and irrelevant.

Perhaps the most fitting epitaph for this uneasy and elusive campaign is the urgent advice offered late in the campaign by the arch-protectionist *English Review*, asking the Tory Free Traders to vote for Mr. Baldwin anyhow:

> Any scruples they may have are met by the probability that whatever fiscal policy may ultimately be framed by the Government will have been subjected to the criticism of a powerful minority both in Parliament and in the country, and will almost certainly have to be submitted to the verdict of another General Election.[33]

In short, Free Traders are offered a second chance to go to the polls against protection, if only enough of them will forego this first chance.

Austen Chamberlain lamented that Baldwin had "said enough to rouse all our opponents to their fullest activity. He has not yet said enough to give guidance to his friends and to

rally their enthusiasm to his support."[34] But the Premier could not escape this dilemma without splitting his party. As it was, dissension marked the Conservative camp from the start. The mere fact of another election caused much distress; poor Sir Charles Wilson, for instance, the Member for Central Leeds, who had just won his seat in a by-election, now declared that "the Prime Minister's programme was so fine that he hoped it would not be necessary to have a General Election until a great part of it had been translated into action". And the Early Closing Association protested "on behalf of the purchasing public, as well as the producers, sellers, and workers", against a December election, which would interfere with the Christmas trade.[35]

Far worse, there were about a dozen Conservative candidates who repudiated their party's policy and stood as Free Traders.[36] Here and there a Conservative Member was announced as having withdrawn from the contest because of opposition to tariffs.[37] By the eve of the poll, it was clear that Baldwin might get a Conservative majority without having a majority for protection—something of a condemnation in itself of the strategy behind the election.

The press, even those sections that were normally Conservative, provided no solace for the Baldwin forces. The *Spectator* moaned, "Protection is the evil genius of the Unionist Party. It falls like one of those family curses, which strike always at the moment of hope and fruition—when the heir is twenty-one, when the eldest daughter is betrothed, when prosperity seems to be at its zenith." The only escape, it concluded, was to heed MacDonald's statement that the issue lay between protection and the Labour programme; Tory Free Traders were "not going to vote down one set of economic fallacies in order to secure the triumph of another set, which they regard with even greater aversion".[38]

The Times was visibly shaken by the thought of an immediate election, before the tariff reformers had had time to think out their programme. When it became obvious that Baldwin was not going to follow its sage advice, *The Times* wryly complimented him upon "the sincerity of his conviction [which] is shown by the readiness with which he is prepared to risk the

highest position in the State", and urged that the campaign be fought with as little said about the details of the tariff programme as possible. "The best course in the circumstances," said The Thunderer gritting its editorial teeth, "is a frank appeal for a free hand to examine the value of protection in this or that industry as a cure for unemployment."[39] *The Times* was never ambiguous about its conviction that Baldwin's Government should be returned, but at no time was it enthusiastic over tariffs, and its tone became increasingly worried and unhappy as the campaign evolved.

Never had a Conservative campaign suffered more from lack of press support. As one Conservative organ put it, "The only whole-hearted backers of the adventure were the *Morning Post* and the *Yorkshire Post*—and they were mouthpieces of the Chief Whip's office."[40] The *Saturday Review* listed itself, *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Morning Post* as the only supporters of Baldwin in the national press; opposed were the *Westminster Gazette*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Chronicle*, *Daily News*, *Daily Herald*, *Evening News*, *Star*, *Nation*, *New Statesman*, and *Outlook*. Listed as "Laodicean in attitude, or else non-committal", were the *Spectator*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Graphic*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Daily Sketch*.[41]

It will be noticed that the mass circulation newspapers were either opposed or occupants of the fence. The strange attitude of the fence-sitters caused much comment and not a little woe among loyal Conservatives. The Beaverbrook and Rothermere papers claimed to be Tory and arch-protectionist, but devoted themselves to attacking Baldwin. Their difficulty was that there was no party which supported their views: a combination of tariff reform, virulent anti-socialism, and the notorious, "Hats Off to France!" approval of the Ruhr invasion—plus a tender recollection of the glories of the Coalition. Typical of the confused advice that resulted was an article in the *Sunday Pictorial* (Rothermere), in which a violent attack on Labour was followed by the information that the writer intended to vote Liberal, on the ground that Baldwin and Company were mediocrities and were getting into trouble with France, while the Liberal leaders, though admittedly not very friendly towards

France either, were at least statesmen and not stupid, stubborn people, and so "would probably be more cautious and prudent in their relations with the French". A leader appearing on the same page saw "the French issue as paramount", but gave no advice as to how a pro-French person should vote in an election fought by three anti-French parties.[42]

On 20 November, an advertisement appeared in the first edition of the *Evening News*, announcing that "An article by Lord Rothermere, 'My Plea for Tariffs', will appear in next Sunday's *Sunday Pictorial*"; this was altered in the 6.30 edition of the same paper on the same day to read, "An article by Lord Rothermere, 'Should Free Trade Have One More Chance?' will appear", etc. The article duly appeared, and again, although it was hard to see what Lord Rothermere wanted the electorate to do, it was clear that the Baldwin Government had little to thank him for, as he explained, "It is because I feel that Mr. Baldwin's tariff proposals do not go half far enough . . . that I ask: Should we give Free Trade one more chance?"[43]

It was the widespread contemporary belief that this erratic behaviour on the part of the Press Lords was the outward manifestation of an attempt to restore the Coalition to Westminster. In this connexion, much was made of a luncheon party, given by Lord Beaverbrook at Leatherhead, for Lloyd George, Austen Chamberlain, Birkenhead and Churchill.[44] Lloyd George's recent biographer maintains that this gathering "had been an inquest, but Fleet Street made it appear a birthday party".[45] Perhaps the Press Lords never lost hope; already they had no love for Baldwin. It is likely, moreover, that their unhappy and ambiguous leaders simply reflected their own confusion and dismay at the turn of events, and especially at the emergence of a tariff reform movement too limited to be an Imperial Preference crusade. Nor did Baldwin help to ease their pain; instead of approaching Beaverbrook and Rothermere himself to enlist their support, he sent emissaries, Stanley Jackson and J. C. C. Davidson.[46]

Still, the defections of Tory Free Trade M.P.s and the coolness of the press might have been forgotten had the cry of

protection found an echoing response of enthusiasm in the constituencies. Instead there was at best tepid approval, as exemplified by the woman Tory Party worker who concluded, "We cannot be any worse off and there is a chance that we shall be better. At any rate there is the promise that there will be no tax on food."[47] Or there was confusion as to what the Government's programme really meant. A *Times* correspondent noted that "The statement is constantly heard that what is wanted is a plain, straightforward explanation of the Government scheme."[48] Often local struggles broke out over whether or not local interests would be helped by tariffs. The complexities of the British economy rose to haunt the protectionists. In Luton, for example, Tories maintained that Luton hat-makers would be saved from foreign competition by tariffs; the Liberals countered by saying that protection would mean a tax on all the materials imported for use in manufacturing the hats. Finally the Tory candidate had to say that "he could give an absolute assurance that the Government did not propose to tax straw braids or plaits".[49] By the time the campaign was over, the Government must have been so hemmed in by pledges such as this, extracted from it by desperate local candidates, that it would have needed weeks of study before it could have given a "plain, straightforward explanation" of its scheme.

If protection did not help the Conservatives to win an election which, without it, they need never have fought, were there other issues out of which the party leadership might hope to fashion the ammunition for victory at the polls?

There was the agricultural subsidy for arable land under cultivation. But this ran into difficulties not dissimilar to those surrounding tariffs: if it pleased the arable farmers, it displeased grass farmers; it raised many questions concerning its workability—how, for instance, was "arable" to be defined? Convinced tariff reformers regarded the new proposal as quite inferior to "an equitable system of protection for agriculture and industry alike".[50]

Concerning unemployment, generally conceded to be the most pressing domestic issue, the party's hopes were largely dependent upon tariff reform. Tories made the most of the

existing provisions for relief works, but a party largely supported by business interests and advertising a programme of tariffs designed to make tax relief possible was hardly in a position to promise greater expenditure in this field. And there were embarrassing statements from individual Tories, such as Lord Hugh Cecil's letter to *The Times* asserting that "there is no escape from the truth that you must in bad times have bad wages or else unemployment".[51]

The Conservatives, like their opponents, blamed the ruined and unsettled condition of Europe for much of the unemployment evil. The manifesto found in the unfair competition of "depreciated currencies and . . . the reduced standard of living in many European countries", an argument for protection. But when it came to assigning the blame for the sad state of Europe, the Tories were badly split. The Government's official policy had been to maintain that the Ruhr invasion was illegal, and to try for a settlement of the reparations question that would preclude a repetition of that invasion. If the Foreign Office under Curzon had fallen far short of Liberal and Labour demands for action against the French, it had gone too far to suit the Francophil section of the Tory Party. Right-wing journals such as the *English Review* and the *National Review* accused the Government of letting down its allies, and the Germans of spending on new industrial plant what should have been paid in reparations.[52] Even Lord Derby's position on the Ruhr was most cautious; "he was not one of those who condemned, as being so insane as some people said, the invasion of the Ruhr"; it had at least taught the Germans that they were beaten and had given them the will to pay. He thought the danger was now that continued occupation might destroy Germany's *ability* to pay.[53]

But the party could not adopt the Francophil policy, not only because its leaders in the Government were pledged to a middle of the road effort to pacify Europe and end the Ruhr occupation, but because important elements in the party were calling for more, not less, interference with the workings of French policy. When the Stresemann Government fell during the campaign, *The Times* bitterly lamented the lack of support

from outside Germany that had, in its view, doomed Dr. Stresemann to failure.[54] This implied criticism of the Baldwin Government was pretty strong, for the loyal *Times* in the midst of an election.

The Ruhr issue, then, was a liability to the Tories. Too critical of the occupation to suit Francophil opinion, as the attitude of the Press Lords showed, the Government was in a poor position to compete with its Labour and Liberal opponents for the anti-French vote. Only by a rather sophisticated line of reasoning could the European problem be made to work to the advantage of the Baldwin régime. "The real issue of the present election," opined *The Times*, was "that there should be a strong British Government, absolutely free . . . to assert its fundamental strength in a Europe that, with all its confused appearance of a dissolving picture, is steadily assuming new, hard outlines."[55]

The "new, hard outlines" meant French hegemony; the only possible "strong British Government" was, to *The Times*, a Conservative Government, for the alternative seemed to be some sort of weak Liberal-Labour coalition. The basic weakness of the argument was that the Baldwin Government had so far given little evidence of strength with regard to the European crisis. It was, in fact, moving towards a solution in the Ruhr, but the record so far had not been impressive, and the tone of the election campaign suggested vague intentions and divided counsels, not firmness and clarity of purpose. The *New Statesman* put it simply: "We have no fault to find . . . with Mr. Baldwin's views on foreign policy; we complain only of his apparently utter inability to make anyone outside Great Britain pay any attention to them."[56]

One final kind of appeal much used by Conservative supporters in this campaign remains to be mentioned, and is of particular interest because of the dominant part it played in the subsequent election of 1924. It may be summed up under the heading "Red Scare", although it appeared in many different forms, and ranged from not unreasonable concern to wild and irresponsible attempts to frighten and to confuse.

The more respected organs of Conservative opinion refrained

from accusing Labour of Leninism; the *Spectator*, for example, foresaw "a log-rolling dictatorship tempered by political corruption", if the Tories lost, but its sinister central figure was not a Bolshevik, but Lloyd George.[57] *The Times* concentrated on the capital levy:

> The mere introduction of such a scheme, the mere return of a majority capable of supporting it, would utterly blast the credit of the country. It would at once arrest all business expansion, cause inextricable confusion, lessen production, and multiply unemployment to an inconceivable degree. It is impossible to think that the country will prefer that reckless and criminal adventure to Mr. Baldwin's honest search for a remedy for unemployment.[58]

But *The Times* and *Spectator* may perhaps be forgiven for displaying nervousness in the face of a political situation so full of worrisome uncertainties—the two-party system in abeyance, electoral defeat for the Tories becoming more and more likely, and the leading Opposition party an untried group with a vocal minority of extremists. Other journals, and some Conservative politicians, were less moderate. Cried the *Saturday Review*, near election eve, "Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and his co-internationals regarded the war merely as a bridge to the world-revolution—in this country by 'Constitutional' fraud, in foreign countries by force. He and his fellows have infected Trade Unionism with the Bolshevik influenza; in all their plans they stipulate for relations with Soviet Russia."[59] That the sin mentioned in the final anticlimatic clause was also advocated in the Liberal Party programme was no barrier to patriots who knew a Constitutional Bolshevik when they saw one. The *Sunday Pictorial*, not to be left behind, saw "A Financial Panic Within 24 Hours", and France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Holland, and the U.S.A. suspending diplomatic relations with Great Britain immediately, should Labour win. The Labour Party was under the control of the "Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale" (meaning the Second International; reference to it by this German title was common among writers anxious to create fears of foreign plots); it was receiving instructions from

this body through "a Communist Jew named Friedrich Adler".*[60] More need hardly be quoted.

Nor were such things confined to the unofficial fringe. The official party monthly, *Gleanings and Memoranda*, devoted much space to linking Labour with Communism. A popular party poster read: "MacDonald for Moscow, Lloyd George for Limehouse, Baldwin for Britain. Keep the Home Fires Burning". Lord Birkenhead called Labour "the slaves of the Third International" (meaning the Second), and suggested that it was adherence to this "German Association" that accounted for Labour's claim that Germany could not pay £2 billion in reparations.[61]

Towards the close of the campaign there were some scenes of rowdyism on the hustings, and much comment, usually connecting this violence with Bolshevism in some way, in anti-Labour newspapers. Austen Chamberlain was said to have been prevented from speaking for the first time in his career; Churchill's car was surrounded by hooting, shouting crowds, many of whom were reported to have spat upon the vehicle; Hogbin, the Conservative and Liberal candidate against the Communist, Saklatvala, in North Battersea, finally cancelled all his meetings because he could not get a hearing. Some actual violence there undoubtedly was, but equally clearly the amount was exaggerated by the press for electoral purposes.[62]

Plainly, much of the Tory appeal was made to the fears rather than the hopes of the voters, a not uncommon tactic. The Labour Party, if judged by the utterances and behaviour of its more eccentric exemplars, was vulnerable in the extreme to this sort of innuendo. The connexion of many of its more prominent leaders with pacifism during the war; the famous incident of the Leeds Conference in 1917 which, under the spell of the first triumphs of the Russian Revolution (before the Bolshevik coup), passed resolutions for creating Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Britain; the threats of direct action from Labour leaders in the campaign against intervention in Russia; the similarity in name and the confusion in the public mind

*The distinguished socialist, son of Viktor Adler, founder of the Austrian Social Democratic Party.

regarding the various socialist internationals; all these factors made it easy to stir up fears concerning the possibility of Labour's accession to power. That this may have saved the Conservatives from a real rout in the election of 1923 is at least a disturbing possibility.

NOTES

[1]Quoted in A. Andreades, *Philip Snowden* (London, 1930), p. 8.
[2]Plus "nine others". Dod, *Parliamentary Companion, 1924*, p. 259.
[3]*The Times*, 3 Nov. 1923. On Baldwin, see G. M. Young, *Stanley Baldwin* (London, 1952); the revealing references in Thomas Jones, *A Diary with Letters, 1931–50* (London, 1954); and C. L. Mowat, "Baldwin Restored?" in the *Jour. of Mod. Hist.*, XXVII (June 1955), 169–74.
[4]*The Times*, 26 Oct. 1923.
[5]Sir Charles Petrie, *Life and Letters of Sir Austen Chamberlain* (London, 1940), II, 230; L. S. Amery, *My Political Life*, Vol. II, *War and Peace, 1914–29* (London, 1953), pp. 281–2. Lord Robert Cecil, *A Great Experiment* (London, 1941), p. 154, does not recall the Cabinet's having been consulted at all.
[6]Young, *Baldwin*, p. 65; R. T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties* (London, 1955) pp. 111 and 121.
[7]W. A. S. Hewins, *Apologia of an Imperialist* (London, 1929), II, 278.
[8]Stanley Salvidge, *Salvidge of Liverpool* (London, 1934), p. 254; *Daily Herald*, 3 Nov. 1923; *The Times*, 3 Nov. 1923.
[9]Petrie, *Chamberlain*, II, 233–8; Neville Chamberlain's diary, 18 Nov. 1923, quoted in Keith Feiling, *Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1946), p. 110.
[10]See speech at Reading, *The Times*, 22 Nov. 1923.
[11]Petrie, II, 233–4; Wickham Steed, *The Real Stanley Baldwin* (London, 1930), pp. 65–66. A. W. Baldwin, *My Father: The True Story* (London, 1956), p. 123, errs in dismissing this as "a subsidiary reason, which Baldwin mentioned years afterwards".
[12]See Petrie, II, 213–26.
[13]Quoted in Amery, *My Political Life*, II, 280.
[14]See *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1923; *Spectator*, 1 Dec. 1923; *National Review*, Dec. 1923, p. 510; Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey: Lloyd George, His Life and Times* (London, 1954), p. 673.
[15]Thomas Jones, *Lloyd George* (London, 1951), p. 207.
[16]Steed, *The Real Stanley Baldwin*, p. 67; Amery, *My Political Life*, II, 279; Sir Harold Nicolson, *King George V: His Life and Reign* (London, 1952), p. 404.
[17]Cited in Feiling, *N. Chamberlain*, p. 109.

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[18]Letter of 15 Oct. 1923, cited in Petrie, II, 229. See also Sir Evelyn Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times* (London, 1955), p. 222.
[19]*The Times*, 26 Oct. 1923.
[20]*The Times*, 27 Oct. 1923; Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson* (London, 1938), pp. 232–3, appears to confuse Henderson's speech of 26 Oct. with MacDonald's of 1 Nov. 1923.
[21]*The Times*, 29 Oct. 1923; *Daily Herald*, 2 Nov. 1923.
[22]F. W. Jowett, in the *Bradford Pioneer*, 16 Nov. 1923, quoted in A. Fenner Brockway, *Socialism Over Sixty Years* (London, 1946), p. 205.
[23]Lord Curzon to his wife, 9 Nov. and 13 Nov. 1923, publ. in Marchioness Curzon of Kedleston, *Reminiscences* (London, 1956), pp. 184, 186–7. See also Feiling, *Life of Neville Chamberlain*, pp. 109–10; Amery, *My Political Life*, II, 284; Nourah Waterhouse, *Private and Official* (London, 1942), p. 290.
[24]*The Times*, 3 Nov. 1923 (numbers added for convenience).
[25]ibid., 14 Nov. 1923.
[26]ibid., 20 Nov. 1923; *Daily Herald*, 3 Nov. 1923.
[27]*Daily Herald*, 3 Nov. 1923.
[28]*Nation*, 8 Dec. 1923, p. 367.
[29]*The Times*, 3 Dec. 1923.
[30]Text in ibid., 19 Nov. 1923.
[31]*Nation*, 1 Dec. 1923, p. 342.
[32]*The Times*, 20 Nov. 1923.
[33]*English Review*, Dec. 1923, p. 673.
[34]*Daily Herald*, 30 Oct. 1923.
[35]*The Times*, 7 and 13 Nov. 1923.
[36]*The Times*, 22 Nov. 1923, listed nine; the *Saturday Review*, 24 Nov. 1923, p. 561, counted thirteen.
[37]See *The Times*, 15, 16 and 21 Nov. 1923.
[38]*Spectator*, 3 Nov. 1923, p. 628, and 10 Nov. 1923, pp. 686–7.
[39]*The Times*, 13 Nov. 1923.
[40]*Fortnightly Review*, Feb. 1924, p. 185.
[41]*Saturday Review*, 24 Nov. 1923, p. 562.
[42]*Sunday Pictorial*, 2 Dec. 1923.
[43]Titles cited in ILP leaflet "A Put-Up Job", dated 29 Nov. 1923; article quoted in the *Spectator*, 1 Dec. 1923, p. 833.
[44]ILP, "A Put-Up Job", cites stories in such disparate organs as the *Morning Post* and the *Daily Herald*.
[45]Owen, *Tempestuous Journey*, p. 675. But cf. Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook* (London, 1956), pp. 173–6.
[46]See Amery, *My Political Life*, II, 283.
[47]*The Times*, 17 Nov. 1923.
[48]ibid., 22 Nov. 1923.
[49]ibid., 1 Dec. 1923.

[50]The Duke of Marlborough, in a letter to *The Times*, 19 Nov. 1923; see also *The Times*, 27 and 30 Nov. 1923.
[51]*The Times*, 5 Nov. 1923.
[52]"The Entente Wreckers", in the *English Review*, Oct. 1923, p. 423; *National Review*, Jan. 1924, p. 681.
[53]*The Times*, 23 Nov. 1923.
[54]ibid., 24 Nov. 1923.
[55]ibid.
[56]*New Statesman*, 1 Dec. 1923, p. 234.
[57]*Spectator*, 24 Nov. 1923, p. 784.
[58]*The Times*, 13 Nov. 1923.
[59]*Saturday Review*, 1 Dec. 1923, p. 588.
[60]*Sunday Pictorial*, 2 Dec. 1923.
[61]*The Times*, 29 Nov. 1923, 6 Dec. 1923.
[62]See *Life and Letters*, Jan. 1924, p. 100, for general account of rowdyism and the allegations thereof.

III

THE ELECTION OF 1923: THE LIBERALS

Lloyd George and the Dragon

For British Liberals, the dozen years before 1923 had been sad and difficult. The Pyrrhic victory over the Lords in 1911, gained at the cost both of the party's clear majority in Parliament and of its reforming élan; the tragic downward slide into the first World War; the fatal effects of the war upon Liberal habits of thought and action; the humiliating split between Lloyd Georgians and Asquithians; and finally, the overshadowing of both, in the election of 1922, by resurgent Tories and emergent Labour—it made a melancholy chronicle indeed.

Against such a background, Baldwin's decision to call an election on the favourite battleground of Liberalism seemed like a parting of the clouds. Liberal reunion became a reality overnight. At all levels, Liberals plunged joyously into the fray. Asquith led off, with a simple but devastating attack on the idea that protection could cure unemployment: he pointed out, at Paisley on 5 November, that of the 1,340,000 then unemployed, 140,000 at the most could be helped by tariffs. Besides, he added, in 1913, when imports had been at higher levels than in any of the past three years, unemployment had been a mere 2 per cent, instead of over 15 per cent as in the recent period.[1] After the election, the protectionist *Fortnightly Review* confessed that the Tories "were utterly crushed at the outset by Mr. Asquith's Paisley deliverance".[2] It put them on the defensive, and there they stayed.

For Liberal journals, it was the signal to work up an indictment of protection supported by impressive batteries of statistics and equally impressive platoons of trained economists. The *Economist* published a special twelve-page supplement entitled "The Case for Free Trade",[3] in which it managed, as so often, to sound like the voice of all the really *sensible* businessmen of

Britain. And the *Nation* followed with an article by J. M. Keynes in his best polemical style. On tariffs as a remedy for unemployment he was disdain itself: "If Protectionists merely mean that under their system men will have to sweat and labour more, I grant their case. By cutting off imports we might increase the aggregate of work; but we should be diminishing the aggregate of wages. . . . Is there anything that a tariff could do, which an earthquake could not do better?"[4]

The serious Liberal advocates built up a substantial case against tariffs, on which platform orators could base their arguments to whatever extent they thought their audiences capable of absorbing economic analysis. Statistics were used to show that it was not a change in the relation of imports to exports, so much as a diminution of all foreign trade that lay at the root of the country's economic difficulties. The *Economist* showed not only that Britain had a favourable balance of trade with both France and Germany, compared with unfavourable ones before the war, but that in the past year, as German trade revived (the great Tory bogey), British exports to Germany had increased more than had imports from Germany.[5] A. L. Bowley, wading through such difficulties as that of deducting, in trade statistics, that portion of exported manufactures which represented imports of raw or semi-finished materials involved in their manufacture, a kind of subtlety at once relevant to the controversy and impossible to reproduce on the public platform, arrived at a clear conclusion: "Nearly half the existing unemployment may be attributed directly to failure of exports."[6] The *Economist* declared that of the total unemployed, 698,337 were in "trades in which there is a preponderance of exports", 395,018 in "home industries", and only 83,762 in "trades in which there is a preponderance of imports", and therefore presumably a chance for a tariff to help.[7]

Protection, then, was irrelevant to a consideration of Britain's unemployment woes, according to the Liberal press. It could not cure the instability of exchanges, nor the exhaustion and depletion of great areas of post-war Europe. As for the peculiarly British weaknesses, obsolescence of plant and immobility of labour, protection would do more harm than good.

It would coddle the inefficient, and merely postpone the day of economic reckoning.[8]

Backed by this formidable array of academic argument, Liberal politicians frolicked on the hustings. Lloyd George, for example, regaled an audience at Leeds with the following:

> Nero used to send a message to his friends when he wanted to be rid of them telling them to cut one of their veins, leaving the choice to them. That was practically the choice to which the country had been subjected in being asked to choose between Protection and the Socialist Party. It amounted to a choice of which they were going to cut—the carotid artery of foreign trade or the jugular vein of capital. . . .
> The sea is a Free Trader. . . . There is only one Tariff Reform Ocean, and that one is frozen up, and you can't get near it. The Arctic Ocean is Protectionist, and the result is that there is no Free Trade there. The seals, the walruses, and the bears—they live on home products.[9]

Winston Churchill was less frivolous and perhaps more telling:

> If they really believe, as so many Protectionists assure us, that the foreigner pays the tax (laughter), and that the cost to the home consumer is not raised by the duty, why should they exempt bread and meat and bacon and all the rest of it from their tariff and thus . . . take the life and soul out of the policy . . .?[10]

Every secondary Tory argument was pursued relentlessly. The Conservative Free Trader who hoped that tariffs would be used as weapons with which to force other nations to lower their tariff barriers was told that such attempts merely produce tariff wars. Besides, if protection were given to one British industry this year, was it really likely that it could be removed the following year, in exchange for concessions from the foreigner affecting other British industries entirely?[11] Even the argument that tariffs would encourage agricultural expansion, and thus increase the national security in time of war, met Liberal counterfire. How, it was asked, could Britain be more isolated than she had been in the last war? Yet she had not starved then. Besides,

she would need imports of raw materials for war production anyhow, and this would entail keeping the sea lanes open. Imperial preference was no answer; experience in 1914–18 had shown that imports of Empire foods had dropped sharply because of shipping shortages.[12]

Some Liberals, especially of the Lloyd George wing, went further, and beat the patriotic drums in return. It was Britain's economic strength and her sea power, both the products of her fidelity to free trade, that carried her to victory in the war, they argued. Sometimes this was said with restraint and dignity, as by the *Economist*:

> Mr. Neville Chamberlain tells us that had his father been listened to 20 years ago, "we should not be where we are today." He is right. Had we adopted the policy of trade restriction in 1904, we should have lacked the merchant shipping, we should have had fewer foreign investments in distant countries, we should not have had the control of economic resources in every part of the world which enabled the Allies to win the war.[13]

Sometimes, however, the argument not only became more strident, but tended to obscure those real and serious economic difficulties which have been plaguing Britain with ever increasing intensity since 1918. Lloyd George, for example, simply denied that anything was wrong; ridiculing laments for "our dying industries," he said. "The war showed that the dying industries were more adaptable, more responsive, than any industries in any land under the sun. (Cheers.) More than that. They enabled us to lend £2,000,000 to protectionist countries in Europe which would have collapsed but for the help of this free trade country."[14]

Liberals were able to bend free trade to the service of other emotional appeals, too. Students of propaganda techniques might well examine the skill with which Lloyd George managed to use the words "free" and "freedom" so as to link free trade, in the minds of his hearers, with every other kind of freedom in existence, and the threat to free trade with all the tyrannies of the ages. Arguments were directed at specific classes, too. On

tariffs, Liberals managed to appeal to groups normally considered to have conflicting class interests; to the point where one wonders whether this was not as much a hint of the weakness of a party fast losing any solid social basis as it was a demonstration of effective publicist's technique. Thus the *Economist* fought a businessman's battle, linking tariffs with Government controls in general, and invoking the wrath of its readers upon both. At the same time Charles McCurdy, M.P., flirted with demagogy, suggesting that Baldwin's scheme was, among other things, "a further tax on the unemployed . . . to save the pockets of the profiteer", and discussing the effect of an increased cost of living upon the value of war pensions in such a way as to imply that the Tories were contemplating a reduction in the actual amount of the pensions.[15]

A minority of the Lloyd Georgians, less adaptable perhaps than their leader, refused even in 1923 to don the robes of Cobden once again. H. A. L. Fisher told a Glasgow audience that "wild horses would not extract from him any indication of the direction in which his sympathies lay on the threadbare topic of the relative merits of Protection and Free Trade". Reginald Berkeley, M.P., attacked the dogmatists of both sides, and suggested a conference of representatives of all the big economic interests and all three political parties to produce a report on the practicality of reducing unemployment by tariffs. And *Outlook*, a journal representing what survived of Coalitionist opinion, cried a curse upon both Baldwinian and Asquithian houses; advocating "an empirical" use of tariffs, it continued, "The air rings with ancient and outworn shibboleths hurled as battlecries between the contending camps. . . . The Tory Premier . . . announces a duty on non-Imperial currants, and instead of laughing at him, Sir John Simon, playing the dull old game, must make himself even more ridiculous than Mr. Baldwin by shedding crocodile tears."[16]

But Asquith was still head of the party, and whatever doubts the Lloyd Georgians may have had about the seriousness of the tariff threat, the Liberals generally seem to have followed their leader in giving free trade the place of honour and of emphasis in their campaign. Of the fifteen paragraphs reported of

Asquith's speech at Walsall on 14 November, to take an example at random, only one was concerned with constructive policy, containing references to the need for settling Europe by a policy of firmness in such trouble centres as the Ruhr and Corfu, and to a policy of "prevention and provision" for unemployment. All the other fourteen paragraphs were devoted to attacking protection. At Queen's Hall the following night, about two-fifths of his speech was spent on the glories of Liberal reunion and on general political raillery, two-fifths on combating protection, the remaining one-fifth on European settlement, leaving no mention of positive domestic policy.[17] And most Liberal speeches seem to have been similar in emphasis.

This was precisely what the *Liberal Magazine* had warned against at the outset of the campaign: "Liberals want more than Free Trade can give. . . . We shall do well to beware of talking all the time on the least positive feature of our programme."[18] But probably the lure of stressing the one really safe common denominator in the party was too strong. The Liberals' positive programme concealed fundamental divergences behind an impressive façade. The manifesto called for public works, for instance, in no uncertain terms:

> The country has made enormous sacrifices to restore the national credit. *A bold and courageous use should be made of that credit on enterprises that would permanently improve and develop the home country and the Empire;* such as internal transport by road and water, afforestation, the supply of cheap power secured by the co-ordinated use of our resources of coal and water, reclamation and drainage of land, the development of Imperial resources especially in the Crown Colonies, railway building in the Dominions and India, the facilitation of overseas settlement under the British flag, cheapening the means of transport in order to develop inter-imperial trade, and a freer use of the provisions of the Trade Facilities Act.[19]

But the use that candidates made of this programme varied greatly. Sir Alfred Mond stressed it heavily; Asquith usually acted as if it did not exist.

No doubt this difference arose partly from the spread of

Liberal interests, from conservative businessmen to the Radicals and Keynesians of the *Nation*. One cannot imagine that a candidate like Sir A. Callaghan, at Rochester, who argued that ". . . . to prevent unemployment you must stimulate trade, and that to stimulate trade it must be free from all bonds and restrictions at home as well as abroad",[20] would give much support to an ambitious public works programme. But often it was simply a difference of opinion over fiscal policy. It was Mond, biggest of Liberal businessmen, who asserted that the Government's policy of continued deflation was "one of the chief causes of unemployment today". No sooner said than the *Economist* was alert to danger: for the Liberals to adopt a conscious policy of inflation would be a grave mistake; it was hoped that such was not Mr. Lloyd George's intention. But Asquith had already settled that:

> Turning to the problem of unemployment, Mr. Asquith urged his hearers not to be led astray by the fashionable catchwords of the hour, inflation, deflation, and all the rest of it. It was not by these paths that the heart of the problem would be reached. There was only one lasting cure and that was the revival and the fullest extension of our overseas trade.[21]

These disagreements caused little stir. *Outlook*, almost alone among journals of the time, suggested that they were really representative of disagreements more fundamental and important than the surface battle over protection.[22]

In reality, the Liberals were at least as badly divided as the Conservatives on economic policies to halt unemployment. It was hard to find acceptable common ground between those elements of Liberalism whose chief difference from the Tories was a devotion to classical economics too sincere to allow even partial protectionist compromises, and those Radicals who looked for alliance with, or at least seduction of, the Labour Party. While Lord Grey might attack labour unrest as second only to European chaos as a cause of unemployment, and the *Economist* call for reducing costs and abolishing ca'canny, the *Nation* was maintaining, "It is towards Labour that a Liberal

Government should lean. . . . No real Liberal . . . can find 'the enemy' in this quarter. . . . Liberalism will fail to do its work unless it succeeds eventually in reestablishing cooperation and fundamental agreement with the great mass of Labour opinion."[23]

Under the circumstances it is not surprising that some gaps showed now and then between contingents of the Liberal army. What is surprising is the degree to which the hastily recaptured unity of the party was preserved through the fight. That this was possible was due, in part, to the heaven-sent issue of protection, for even those Coalitionists who had no fixed objection to tariffs found it easy enough to campaign against them, since they were equally free of fixed prejudices in their favour. And escape was always possible from the dilemmas of unemployment into that traditional Liberal stronghold, foreign policy.

Here, the manifesto was forceful, both in its castigation of Tory failure and its enunciation of Liberal policy:

> For a whole year neither our Allies, nor Neutral Powers, nor our late enemies, have known whether in this crucial issue [the Ruhr] Britain had a voice or mind or conscience of her own.
>
> By moral indecision, by divided counsels, and by diplomatic incompetence, the Government have failed, in Europe and Asia alike, to make one single effective effort to assert our rights, to restore our trade, or to bring back peace and order to a distracted world . . . the inaction of the Government has been a potent contributory cause of unemployment at home. . . .[24]

It went on to advocate the economic restoration of Europe, "the reopening of full relations with Russia", and whole-hearted support of the League of Nations as the alternative to "the perpetuation of national enmities and the piling up of the means of destruction". Every effort was thus made to attack the Tories where they were vulnerable, to divide them where they showed signs of division. If the attack on Tory "inaction" was, in the light of history, somewhat unfair to Curzon's efforts at a solution in the Ruhr, it was no more than was generally thought at the time by friends as well as enemies of France. The declaration

in support of the League was aimed with equal force at kindling Liberal idealism and at showing up the wide crack in the Tory front between die-hards and pro-Leaguers, between the Duke of Northumberland and Lord Robert Cecil. Finally, the whole thing was tied to the question of unemployment.

Yet even in the field of foreign policy, Liberal reunion was only accomplished with some weakening of the fabric. The *Nation* celebrated Armistice Day by referring to the Versailles peace as "the most stupendous failure of human wisdom in all the annals of men", and called its architects "political adventurers with their eyes on elections, and inflamed nationalists with their thoughts on revenge".[25] Hardly an appropriate tribute to the distinguished statesman whose return to the party as its second in command was about to be celebrated with cries of joy and undying affection. But it is hard to see how Liberals could avoid treading on Lloyd George's toes in dealing with reparations. Some did not even try; Keynes wrote, "The proposal to cure unemployment by a tariff on manufactured goods, which will also bring in a revenue of £25 million, is a gigantic fraud—comparable in its intrinsic absurdity to the fraud of the 1918 Election about Germany Paying for All."[26] Fortunately, his own worst enemies would not have called Lloyd George an excessively sensitive man. Equally fortunately, he was far too adaptable a statesman to have experienced real difficulty in accepting the general party position on foreign affairs; there was not the gap between him and Asquith in this area that existed, say, between the Tory die-hards and the Cecilians.

But the Liberals did suffer in worse degree than the Tories from disunity. After all, the two wings of the party had been openly split until the eve of the campaign. Behind the split was an acrimonious history, dating back almost ten years. Aggravating it was the comparative wealth of the Lloyd George element, with its notorious "war chest". True, in 1923 some £100,000 was made available to the Liberal campaign by the Trustees of the fund.[27] But even such generosity was resented, when it put the party in the position of a charity patient.

Furthermore, the tendency towards division is almost bound to be far stronger in a party standing between two alternative

extremes of policy and social background; dissident Liberals, of either faction, could always shift their allegiance to the Right or Left, whereas a Tory die-hard or Labour left-winger had no real resting place outside his own party. The crumbling process, to the profit of both Tories and Labourites, was always in progress; it made party discipline both more essential and more difficult of attainment for the Liberals. It was the seriousness of its internal divisions that constituted the most severe obstacle to the Liberal Party's chances in 1923. At first glance, the Liberals enjoyed many advantages. They were fighting on their favourite issue. Their published programme included most of the positive proposals advocated by the Labour Party, minus such dubious attractions as the capital levy and nationalization. They had money. They had "a galaxy of platform talent with which no other party can even pretend to compete".[28] If the electors had been voting solely on the basis of programme and the individual abilities of party leaders, the Liberals would have won a clear majority. The party also had the "incalculable moral advantage of the enthusiasm which has been born of its spectacular reunion".[29]

Yet behind this glittering façade lay the long years of factional struggle, of erosion of support in the constituencies. The top Liberal leaders, though individually impressive, made an ill-assorted team. The very brilliance of the Liberal programme may be considered a tell-tale sign of weakness; it is often the fate of declining parties to put up exciting programmes, for they can afford to dispense with the dull compromises induced by responsibility and the presence of strong interest groups within the ranks. The weary Olympian who led the Liberal Party in 1923 did not expect to win; he did not even wish to win. He wrote to a friend:

> I have been going through the general list of candidates, and I cannot for the life of me see how we are going to come back more than 200 strong, it may be less. Labour is the dark horse. The result which I should welcome would be that we should exceed Labour, and Baldwin find himself with a majority of thirty to forty—useless for his purpose, but sufficient to compel him to go on with the Government.[30]

NOTES

[1]*Spectator*, 10 Nov. 1923, p. 682.
[2]*Fortnightly Review*, Feb. 1924, p. 187.
[3]*Economist*, Supplement to issue of 17 Nov. 1923.
[4]*Nation*, 1 Dec. 1923, pp. 335–6.
[5]*Economist*, 10 Nov. 1923, p. 821.
[6]A. L. Bowley in the *Economist*, 17 Nov. 1923, p. 865.
[7]A further 167,550 were in trades difficult to classify. *Economist*, supplement to 17 Nov. 1923, p. 4.
[8]See the convenient summary by Prof. Cassel of Liberal arguments, most of them current in the campaign. *Economist*, 15 Dec. 1923.
[9]*The Times* and the *Yorkshire Post*, 28 Nov. 1923, quoted in *Liberal Magazine*, Dec. 1923, p. 737.
[10]*The Times*, 17 Nov. 1923.
[11]*Nation*, 1 Dec. 1923, pp. 337–9; *Economist*, 1 Dec. 1923, p. 954; letter from Lord Charnwood to *The Times*, 30 Nov. 1923.
[12]*Economist*, supplement to 17 Nov. 1923, pp. 8–11.
[13]ibid., 27 Oct. 1923, p. 740.
[14]*The Times*, 22 Nov. 1923.
[15]*Economist*, supplement to 17 Nov. 1923, p. 12; *The Times*, 17 Nov. 1923 and 5 Dec. 1923.
[16]*The Times*, 17 Nov. 1923; *Outlook*, 3 Nov. 1923, pp. 333–4, and 10 Nov. 1923, p. 353.
[17]*The Times*, 15 and 16 Nov. 1923.
[18]*Liberal Magazine*, Nov. 1923, pp. 646–7.
[19]Text in *Liberal Magazine*, Dec. 1923, p. 713. Italics in original.
[20]*The Times*, 23 Nov. 1923.
[21]*The Times*, 6 Nov. 1923; *Economist*, 10 Nov. 1923, p. 822; *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Nov. 1923, quoted in *Liberal Magazine*, Nov. 1923, p. 679.
[22]*Outlook*, 1 Dec. 1923, p. 404.
[23]*The Times*, 15 Nov. 1923; *Economist*, 10 Nov. 1923, p. 822; *Nation*, 1 Dec. 1923, p. 334.
[24]*Liberal Magazine*, Dec. 1923, pp. 711–12.
[25]*Nation*, 10 Nov. 1923, p. 209.
[26]ibid., 1 Dec. 1923, p. 336.
[27]Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey: Lloyd George, His Life and Times* (London, 1954), p. 684.
[28]*New Statesman*, 1 Dec. 1923, p. 233.
[29]ibid.
[30]*H.H.A.: Letters of the Earl of Oxford and Asquith to a Friend* 2nd series, 1922–7, ed. Desmond McCarthy (London, 1934), pp. 90–91.

IV

THE ELECTION OF 1923; LABOUR
The Politics of Glorious Aspirations

For the Liberals, it was a struggle for survival in 1923; for Labour, flushed with its victories of the previous year, it was nothing so desperate. The one real concern was lest the resurgent Liberals should overtake them, and become the official Opposition. Opinions as to the likelihood of this varied greatly,* but many Labourites were sustained by a serene confidence that they were the party of the future, and the Liberals a mere historical remnant, kept alive only by the tariff issue.

Given this situation, it was to Labour's interest to deprecate the importance of the protection issue, and to try to shift the struggle to other ground. MacDonald struck the keynote in his Hotel Belgravia speech on 1 November: the tariff issue was "a diversion . . . a magnificent method of sidetracking a serious movement"; but Labour would not be trapped into fighting a defensive battle. "The fight we are in now is not Protection versus Free Trade; the fight we are in now is Protection versus the Labour programme."[1]

But this was a difficult effort to sustain, and in fact the Labour campaign laid heavy emphasis upon the iniquities of tariffs, while at the same time asserting that the whole issue was obsolete and an election based on it nothing but a sham battle. Thus a Labour poster showed a protectionist orator and a labourer; says the worker, "Will Protection give us work?" Candidate: "Well—er—not directly, but by raising your cost of living it will increase your need for a job."[2] The ILP saw Baldwin as seeking "a sinister protection—protection not of the lives and well-being of the people, but of the dividends and wealth of the rich." The party's *Notes for Speakers* indignantly denied a Tory claim that labour was naturally protectionist,

*See below, Ch. V, p. 69.

and that the British Labour Party was the only one in the world which would fight for free imports; the *Notes* quoted telegrams from labour leaders in eight countries supporting the party's stand.[3] But at the same time, a Low cartoon showed a worried Stanley Baldwin, in jockey's costume, astride a skeleton (literally) of a horse, at the base of which is inscribed: "Remains of PROTECTION, out of High Prices by Monopoly, Ridden to death by J. Chamberlain, 1906." The ILP pointed out that in fifty-four constituencies Labour faced a Liberal opponent, with no protectionist candidate in the field—which proved, said the leaflet, that the tariff issue was "all bunkum".[4]

Clearly there was uneasiness over an issue on which agreement with the Liberals was unavoidable, and a distinctively Labour point of view hard to develop. Moreover, Baldwin's taunts were not wholly without foundation; there were elements in the Labour Party not unalterably opposed to tariffs.[5] But the old Radical tradition remained strong in the party, and it is significant that the top leaders—MacDonald, Snowden, Thomas, Clynes, Henderson—were all staunch Free Traders, except Thomas, whose convictions were lightly held in any case and easily subordinated to considerations of practical politics. So Labour gave much time to the defence of free trade, all in pointing out carefully that its position rested on pragmatism, not principle. Thus the *Daily Herald*:

> We do not pretend that any sacred principle is outraged because the Premier intends to make Protection the principal plank in his programme at the election. . . . The difference between Protection and Free Trade is not, in our judgment, a matter of principle at all. It is a matter of convenience. This country, which cannot feed itself and which depends for its living so largely upon the export of its manufactures, would find Protection extremely inconvenient.[6]

There were some constituencies, however, where the battle raged over socialism, and protection was ignored on both sides. These were usually straight fights, including, one may assume, all the thirty-one Liberal-Labour contests, as well as some of the struggles with Tories. Concentration on socialism was

especially prevalent where Labour was very strong—Attlee's fight at Limehouse, Kirkwood's at Dumbarton Burghs.[7] And it grew more common in the closing week of the campaign, as the issues of socialism and the capital levy were more and more singled out for violent attacks by Conservative candidates growing worried about the effectiveness of the protectionist appeal.

Aside from free trade, Labour campaigned on a variety of issues. Like the Liberals, Labourites attacked French policy in the Ruhr and Tory weakness in meeting it. For some candidates, particularly those associated with the Union of Democratic Control, Europe was the main issue. E. D. Morel called the re-emergence of protection "culminating proof that reparations so far as we were concerned were a huge imposture", for tariffs were now invoked to keep out the very imports from Germany on which payment of reparations depended. The French invasion of the Ruhr was evidence of "a comprehensive scheme of military domination comparable only in its carefully-thought-out moves to the plan of the great Napoleon". As for Baldwin's latest move for a settlement of the vexed issue, "No inquiry into Germany's capacity to pay was wanted. What was wanted was a world conference to prevent Europe from slipping into the abyss."[8]

Labour was able to go much farther than the Liberals in promising a revolution in foreign affairs. Now, more than ever before, the party was in a position to capitalize on the fact that, of the three major contestants, Labour was most free from responsibility for the state of the world following the war. With the long history of Lloyd George's futile conferences behind them, and the new and mounting horrors of the Ruhr upon them, the voters were more likely than ever to be receptive to Labour's sweeping programme:

> . . . a policy of international cooperation through a strengthened and enlarged League of Nations; the settlement of disputes by conciliation and judicial arbitration; the immediate calling by the British Government of an international conference (including Germany on terms of equality) to deal with the revision of the Versailles Treaty, especially reparations and debts; and the resumption of

> free economic and diplomatic relations with Russia. This will pave the way for disarmament, the only security for the nations.[9]

MacDonald was a trifle more guarded concerning Treaty revision: "The Versailles Treaty has to be revised, but in no hostile spirit to one of our old allies. We cannot begin afresh until it is revised."[10] How this was to be squared with "a firm, courageous and moral British policy that will make certain nations of Europe ashamed of themselves",[11] the Leader of the Opposition did not say. It is unlikely that the promise of "no hostile spirit" was even noticed at the time by his fervent and Francophobe admirers.

In many areas, foreign policy played a very minor role, though even then revision of the Treaty was likely to appear in the election address of the Labour candidate.[12] Probably the chief issue in the minds of Labour people was unemployment. On this issue, said the *New Statesman*,

> . . . the Labour Party obviously means business. Not only will it promise far more than any other party dare promise, but if it should come into power it will do far more. . . . [Labour is] the only party with a practical programme on the subject and the only party which can be trusted to treat it, after the election, as the most urgent and important of all national problems.[13]

There is no reason to doubt that this view was shared by Labour's supporters and leaders with complete sincerity, in the autumn of 1923. And the theme, "The Labour Party alone has a positive remedy for unemployment",[14] was repeated over and over again in this campaign.

What was this programme? The manifesto described it:

> The Labour programme of national work includes the establishment of a national system of electrical power supply, the development of transport by road, rail, and canal, and the improvement of national resources by land drainage, reclamation, afforestation, town-planning, and housing schemes. These not only provide a remedy for the present distress, but are also investments for the future.

In thus calling for an ambitious programme of public works, Labour was in agreement, not only with the Liberals, but with the British Legion, which had come forward with a scheme for a £200 million works loan, to finance a great system of working relief, and had been turned down by Baldwin. The Labour slogan was "Work or Maintenance". Unceasing attacks were made on the "gap", a waiting period of three weeks between the expiration of covenanted benefit and the beginning of uncovenanted benefit for unemployed workers. The inadequacies of Unemployed Insurance left people dependent on the Poor Law, and this placed unfair burdens on the poorer communities; Labour demanded that relief be national, not local. The party advocated raising temporarily the school-leaving age, so as to keep juveniles out of the labour market as long as possible. Above all, the Tory Government was attacked for offering too little relief, and great use was made of an unfortunate phrase reported to have been uttered in a speech by Sir William Joynson-Hicks, the Minister of Health: "Better do nothing than to do something wrong." Labour, it was implied, would move fast, and without the undue regard for expense that had shackled Tory efforts.[15]

In the Labour campaign, such relatively hard-headed appeals to material interest were mixed with generous doses of socialist evangelism. The ILP manifesto is a good example:

> Unemployment is due to nothing more and nothing less than a false purpose in our industrial and financial life, leading to absence of a common plan in the production and distribution of goods. . . .
>
> Science dictates this truth, but its acceptance must involve the end of a haphazard system designed for the making of private profit. The whole industrial field must be viewed as a general considers and plans his campaign. Could a battle be won if each battalion fought separately for its own gain? Can a nation's industry prosper if each trade or combine works alone and for its separate profit? Few soldiers would give their lives for the private profit of their commander. Few workers will bend their energy for the private profit of their employer. Can the method of science be applied to nothing save the organization of men

for war and their equipment with instruments of destruction?[16]

Arguments of this kind gave a certain timelessness to the Labour Party's campaigns; they remained the same through all vicissitudes of superficial politics. Of their realism, even their relevance, there might well be doubt, however. Reading over the ILP's declaration, one might conclude that in some way unemployment was a problem of workers unwilling to work, instead of a matter of work being unavailable. As for the military analogy, few Labour voters can have paused to consider its implications. They were content to look forward to the magic day when "production for profit" would give way to "production for use",[17] and such evils as unemployment would vanish into thin air.

The most distinctive feature of the Labour programme was perhaps the capital levy or, as the manifesto now called it, "a non-recurring, graduated War Debt Redemption Levy". This was the favourite point of attack for all opponents of Labour. Alarmists cried that it would ruin Britain in one blow. More cautious critics called it "a tax upon the means, instead of upon the fruits, of production".[18] As a great contraction of credit, it would increase unemployment. It punished thrift and rewarded improvidence. The needed assessments would be enormously expensive to make. Finally, if the tax were really a legitimate one, asked the critics, why restrict it to fortunes of £5,000? Was it because the Labour Party could thus single out one small group to bear the burden, and so buy the votes of the great majority who would go free?

As a positive issue, the levy had disadvantages, too. It was not easily understood. It lacked the specific, tangible appeal of a new social service or a concrete piece of tax reduction. Above all, it seemed a somewhat academic proposition. As one critic wrote, ". . . no one believed that it had any relevance to the problem of unemployment, and it gave the Labour campaign an air of unreality which was a serious handicap".[19] No wonder that during the campaign most Labour references to the levy were defensive, or that occasional efforts were made to push it under the rug. Arthur Greenwood said that its effect on unem-

ployment would only be indirect, and that it was not intended as an alternative to tariffs, but as "a challenge to the Government's failure to relieve the national finances of a heavy dead-weight burden of debt".[20] One candidate, a Captain Gordon, offered his unsympathetic Brighton audience a defence of capital levy reminiscent of the *English Review*'s appeal to Tory Free Traders (above, p. 30): it would not be put into operation, said he, until it had been submitted to the electorate again for approval.[21] Snowden publicly admitted, on 12 November, that the time for a levy was not so favourable as it had been three or four years earlier.[22] This admission got far less attention than it deserved, perhaps because opponents did not want to lose a useful anti-Labour weapon.

Why, then, did Labour hang on to the capital levy? Privately, MacDonald is said to have blamed it for the loss of fifty seats that Labour would otherwise have won. But publicly he defended it, right after the election, as a "symbol of financial straightforwardness . . . a guarantee that we were to put burdens on property and not on life. It gave spirit and energy to our fight."[23] What he was implying was that abandonment of the levy would have seemed a betrayal of principle to many of the party faithful. The *Daily Herald*, back on 2 July 1923, had ridiculed Baldwin for allegedly approving of the levy in the circumstances of the war, but not in those of 1923. "The consequences to markets, prices and credit would have been the same during the war as they would be now," said the *Herald* innocently. Furthermore the burden of the debt did weigh heavily on Labour minds, and the levy was one of the few specific proposals which Labour could call its own, not overlapping with the programme of any other party. A touching faith in the levy as a universal panacea extended high in the Labour hierarchy and lingered long, as witness J. R. Clynes, writing in 1937:

> All forms of taxation have been bitterly opposed; this one will not be less so. But all financial experts know now that it will benefit the vast majority of the nation by taking away from a tiny and powerful section an accumulation of wealth which they cannot use, but which they guard like

> curs in the manger. After it is all over, they will still be rich men; the difference will be that there will speedily be no more slums, no more starving children, and very little unemployment.[24]

Of the second pillar of Labour's socialism, nationalization of industry, there was but a brief mention in the manifesto, calling for "public ownership and control" of mines, railways, and electric power stations. During the campaign, nationalization was usually mentioned only in the context of general appeals for the new socialist order, except by candidates with large numbers of miners or railwaymen among their constituents. Occasionally a local candidate would take it upon himself to add an item to the list of subjects for nationalization.

Much more emphasis was given the almost limitless suggestions for social welfare advanced by the party. The manifesto breaks out in a veritable rash of proposals as it nears its end, some specific, others very general statements of intention:

> When Labour rules it will take care that little children shall not needlessly die; it will give to every child equality of opportunity in education; it will make generous provision for the aged people, the widowed mothers, the sick and disabled citizens. It will abolish the slums, promptly build an adequate supply of decent homes, and resist decontrol [of rents] till the shortage is satisfied. It will place the drink traffic under popular control.

All this, plus fair play for veterans and their dependants, and full equality of the sexes, was promised, before the manifesto closed with an appeal to the people "to oppose the squalid materialism that dominates the world to-day".

Programmes alone do not win elections, however. Capital levy and nationalization aside, there was not much difference between the Labour and Liberal programmes. Labour made no public works proposals that were not also made by the Liberals; indeed, the latter suggested a few projects, chiefly in Imperial development, not included by Labour. Even in such matters as local option for the liquor trade and equal rights for women, the two manifestoes are in agreement. As for the general ap-

proach to economic and social problems, it would be difficult to find a MacDonald pronouncement more "advanced" than this, from the *Liberal Magazine*:

> Liberals want to reform the haphazard and unjust conditions that prevail in industry; they want to readjust the present absurdly disproportionate distribution of the product of industry; they want to see working people getting more out of their work, and idle people getting less out of their idleness; they want to establish security of livelihood for every willing worker. These are the things that matter. These are the topics that occupy, and justly occupy, the minds of millions of actual living people who are toiling to make ends meet in grubby, noisy, overcrowded houses.[25]

Given the similarity between Liberal and Labour programmes, it is amusing, though scarcely surprising, to hear Labour spokesmen proclaiming the Liberal Party's bankruptcy of ideas; there was, said the *New Statesman*, "no Liberal policy definite enough to conduct a true intellectual battle on". In fact, it was precisely the definite parts of Labour's policy (excepting the capital levy and nationalization) that were also to be found in the Liberal manifesto. The true difference between the Liberal and Labour programmes lay in just those *in*definite, general aspirations concerning society and its economic structure that were the mainstay of Labour's socialism. It was MacDonald, not Asquith, who was found asking his audience, at the Caledonian Road Baths, "Are you a party with an ideal? Have you a conception of something so beautiful that it appeals to the best that is in you and draws out the best in you?" Or describing the socialist millennium: "We are going to develop our own country, we are going to work it for all it is worth, to bring human labour into touch with God's natural endowments, and we are going to make the land blossom like a rose and contain houses and firesides where there shall be happiness and contentment and glorious aspirations."[26]

Of course there was more to it than that. The steady, inexorable forward march of Labour, as contrasted with the incipient disintegration of the Liberal Party, could not be

ascribed to rhetorical differences. Partly, it was a matter of Liberal instability. A prominent convert from Liberalism, Dr. Christopher Addison (later the Labour Party's leader in the Lords), went through the Liberal manifesto item by item, contrasting each promise in it with the actual performance of the Lloyd George Government.[27] His conclusion was not that the policy was a bad one, but that the Liberals could not be trusted to put it into effect. Lloyd George was hardly more than a convenient symbol for the widespread feeling that, while Labour and Liberals might say the same things, the former meant them and the latter did not. The real difference lay in the fact that the Liberal Party was not based on a solid social group committed by self interest to these policies, but in fact contained considerable interests opposed by nature to their execution. When a Labour leader called for higher taxes on the rich, or a vast programme of public works, or increased social benefits, there was no businessman's section of the party ready to raise objections. And in 1923, there was as yet no clear indication that there might be other obstacles within the party to the enactment of its large ideas; whatever else the Labour Party was held to be, it was considered a party with the will to act.

Labour did its best, during the campaign, to make clearer the distinction between itself and the rival free trade party by pushing the Liberals towards the Tory camp. The *Notes for Speakers* give a picture of this effort. There are quotations from Churchill on the community of interests between Liberals and Conservatives and on the need for coalition against Labour. Clever use is made of the votes of National Liberal M.P.s, during the days of the Coalition, against Labour motions and resolutions, with the votes of Asquithian Liberals in support of the same Labour moves discreetly omitted, thus making it seem that the Liberals as a group had been hand in glove with the Conservatives throughout the post-war period. A Labour pamphlet, "Capital or Labour? The Election Issue of 1923", cruelly cited the instalments of protection (such as the Safeguarding of Industries Act) that had already been put on the statute book with the aid of (National) Liberal votes. "Both

Tory and Liberal capitalists," it concluded, "want to keep capitalist control. That is the fundamental plank in their programme, and all the rest is just to deceive the workers into thinking there is some difference between Tory and Liberal."

It is small wonder, in view of such attacks, that there was little Liberal-Labour co-operation "to avoid splitting the progressive vote" in 1923. *The Times* could find but one instance of an explicit arrangement: at Eastbourne, Sussex, a fairly safe Tory seat. In a few scattered cases there was tacit co-operation, as at Newcastle-under-Lyme, where the local Liberals decided not to oppose Colonel Wedgwood, the old Radical turned Labourite, and at Preston, a two-member constituency in which Tom Shaw, the Labour candidate, advised his supporters not to waste their second vote—implying that they should vote for the Liberal. From Manchester came reports of a different sort of "arrangement": the Liberals were said to have kept Labour from an all-out attack there by threatening to enter Clynes's race in the Platting Division.[28]

Nationally, the bare statistics offer some rough estimate of the net results of Liberal-Labour co-operation and antagonism. In forty-six cases where there had been a three-way fight in 1922, either the Liberal or the Labourite withdrew in 1923 to leave the other a clear run against the Conservative. Of these, twenty were cases of Labour withdrawals, twenty-six of Liberal. On the other hand, in seventy-three cases where there had been straight fights in 1922, either a Liberal or a Labour candidate was now entered to make it three-way. These figures, while not overwhelming, suggest that antagonism between Liberal and Labourite outweighed co-operation in 1923.* And whatever fragments there were of co-operation were balanced by instances of that Liberal-Conservative alliance which was to be

*Except where otherwise noted, statistics relating to the elections of 1922, 1923 and 1924 are taken directly or derived from Dod's *Parliamentary Companion*. Analysis of the effects of withdrawals and interventions in the election is made below, Ch. V, pp. 76-79. Unless otherwise specified, statistics on withdrawals and interventions omit the remaining two- and three-Member constituencies, results for which are difficult to incorporate meaningfully with those for single-Member constituencies.

so marked a feature of the next General Election. Outstanding examples occurred at Accrington and at Newcastle East, where C. Roden Buxton and Arthur Henderson, respectively, were victims of successful anti-socialist pacts. Local understandings were reported at Aberavon, Derby, and Blackburn.[29] Most interesting of all, in Scotland Conservatives were reported to have attempted a general arrangement with the Liberals "in regard to those constituencies in which it is felt that the only hope of defeating the Socialists lies in avoiding a split in the moderate vote". Apparently the Scots Liberals, though reported to be far from confident, refused; Conservative headquarters persisted in giving a free run to ex-National Liberals anyhow.[30] The dramatic Labour gains of 1922 in Scotland thus produced in the following year a foreshadowing, north of the border, of the anti-Labour coalition that was to dominate the 1924 election throughout Britain.

But meanwhile there were moves in the other direction, too, such as the end of the truce whereby the Tories and Liberals had split the two-Member constituencies of Bolton, Oldham, and Stockport; the Conservatives now entered second candidates in all three, as *The Times* said, "to make the challenge to all other parties unmistakable".[31] All told, the Tories abandoned sixteen contests to give Liberals straight fights with Labour, while intervening in twenty-eight cases where straight fights had taken place in 1922.

One more matter of inter-party relations needs mention. Still wooing the Labour Party in their fashion, the Communists avoided all clashes with Labour candidates in 1923.[32] There were eight Communist candidates, but six of these stood as Labour nominees. Only Walton Newbold, sitting Member for Motherwell, and Willie Gallacher at Dundee stood as Communists. Labour left Newbold a free field against a Liberal and an Independent who later turned Tory. Gallacher was, in effect, opposed, Labour supporting the Prohibitionist, Scrymgeour, in tandem with E. D. Morel. The success or failure of opponents' efforts to link Labour with Bolshevism did not depend on the fate of the six Communist-Labour candidates (all of whom were defeated). But their presence does serve as

a reminder that uncritical loyalties to class solidarity, and to an undefined socialism, still kept the Labour Party from wholly solving the problem of Communists in its ranks.

In many ways, the 1923 election, despite the bizarre manner of its coming, fell into a familiar pattern as far as the Labour Party was concerned. The fundamental stability of the Labour programme has been mentioned; organizationally the tale was the same. Finance was a difficulty, as always, but not an insurmountable one. A fund of £23,565 had been raised, £10,000 of it from the National Union of Railwaymen, for the purpose of carrying Labour's message into the rural areas; this was turned over to general election purposes, £16,775 of it doled out in grants to 215 constituencies, and £1,737 spent on manifestoes and kindred national expenses, leaving over £5,000 to fight another day.[33] As always, the party depended heavily upon its band of devoted volunteers.

At the Dissolution, Labour had but 239 adopted candidates. By polling day, almost 200 more had been added, "an effort which may be regarded as almost unique in the history of British politics," said the party's National Agent. Labour's total of 434 candidates, compared with 412 the previous year, meant fairly good coverage of the country (always excepting Northern Ireland), even though it trailed the Conservatives' 536, and the Liberals' 454. A major increase was achieved on the periphery of London: here forty Labourites stood where there had been but twenty-seven in 1922.[34] Otherwise the only significant changes were a gain of seven candidates in Scotland, buoyed by Labour's triumphs there in 1922, and a loss of seven in Lancashire and Cheshire, the stronghold of free trade, where the impulse to avoid conflicts with the Liberals may be assumed to have been most common.

Labour's major disadvantages remained stable, too. In the rural areas, Labour was still trying to achieve recognition, let alone power, against the stifling predominance of the local gentry. One crusader reported afterwards: "Often after an apathetic meeting in a freezing schoolroom—the vicar saw to it that we had only our legal right (the schoolroom key)—a man would come up in the darkness outside and whisper, 'Don't 'ee

worry, there's plenty as would like to vote for 'ee'."[35] The press, too, remained either cool or hostile. The *Daily Herald* listed the space given a major MacDonald campaign speech: the *Daily Mail* had given ten inches; the *Chronicle* four and three-quarters; the *News* five and three-quarters; the *Express* three and one-half; the *Westminster Gazette* two and one-half. The *Herald* had given it fifty-four. Even *The Times* seemed to slight the Labour campaign; in a sample seven successive days in November, its announcements of forthcoming speeches included a total of twenty-three Labour meetings as against 212 for Liberals and Conservatives.[36] And the *Herald*, with its circulation of less than 400,000, could not counter the enemy's press battalions.

Nevertheless, the Labour Party's youth, and its feeling of being heir to the future, made the most routine electoral struggle seem fraught with significance and opportunity. Moreover, whenever non-Labour people fell to elaborating schemes for solving Britain's post-war problems they found, as Lloyd George had demonstrated at the war's end and as the Liberal manifesto now proved again, that these plans looked very much like the Labour Party proposals.[37] The Coalition had had plans but lacked the determination, in the face of economic depression, chaos abroad, and the self-imposed onslaughts of the Geddes Axe, to put them into effect. Since then, the search for tranquillity had nearly excluded, by definition, both plans and execution. Who, then, was the most likely to tackle these problems boldly? Was it Baldwin, with his tariff, or half a tariff? Or the cool, classic Parliamentarian Asquith? It could hardly be doubted that it was the earnest, eager troops of Labour who were most likely to move boldly, if expensively, towards the New Jerusalem, should the electorate give them the chance.

During the campaign, George Benson wrote: "For the last century Liberal and Tory Governments have alternately held power. Jointly they must bear the responsibility for our present state."[38] How many Labourites guessed, as the polls closed on the night of 6 December 1923 that the luxury of such statements as this was now to be denied them forever?

NOTES

[1]*Daily Herald*, 2 Nov. 1923.
[2]Reproduced in *Review of Reviews*, Dec. 1923, p. 375.
[3]ILP, "Call to Its Members", *The Times*, 20 Nov. 1923; Labour Party, *Notes for Speakers*, 1923, # 69, 69c.
[4]*Review of Reviews*, Dec. 1923, p. 376; ILP Information Committee, "A Put Up Job", 29 Nov. 1923.
[5]See *Daily Herald*, 30 Oct. 1923 (concerning John Hodge, M.P.); see also *Gleanings and Memoranda*, Dec. 1923, pp. 619–22, and Ch. VIII, pp. 147–8, below.
[6]*Daily Herald*, 27 Oct. 1923.
[7]*The Times*, 28–29 Nov. 1923.
[8]Speech at Dundee, *Daily Herald*, 8 Nov. 1923.
[9]Labour manifesto, text in *Liberal Magazine*, Dec. 1923, p. 719.
[10]Speech at Dewsbury, *Daily Herald*, 12 Nov. 1923.
[11]Speech at Hotel Belgravia, London, *Daily Herald*, 2 Nov. 1923.
[12]See, e.g., case of South-east Essex, *Shop Assistant*, 8 Dec. 1923, p. 891.
[13]*New Statesman*, 10 Nov. 1923, p. 133.
[14]Labour manifesto, *Liberal Magazine*, Dec. 1923, p. 719.
[15]For Labour's critique, see National Joint Council, *Work and Wages Campaign—Facts for Speakers* (London, 1923).
[16]*The Times*, 20 Nov. 1923.
[17]See *Daily Herald*, 7 Nov. 1923.
[18]W. W. Paine, of Lloyd's Bank, in *English Review*, Nov. 1923, p. 565.
[19]A. G. Gardiner, in the *Nation*, 8 Dec. 1923, p. 370.
[20]*The Times*, 24 Nov. 1923.
[21]ibid., 30 Nov. 1923.
[22]*Daily Herald*, 13 Nov. 1923.
[23]Hugh Dalton, *Call Back Yesterday* (London, 1953), p. 143; *Socialist Review*, Jan. 1924, pp. 6–7.
[24]J. R. Clynes, *Memoirs* (London, 1937), I, 338.
[25]*Liberal Magazine*, Nov. 1923, p. 647.
[26]*Daily Herald*, 13 Nov. 1923; ibid., 2 Nov. 1923.
[27]*New Leader*, 30 Nov. 1923, p. 9.
[28]*The Times*, 21, 24, and 27 Nov. 1923.
[29]*Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1924, p. 224; *New Statesman*, 24 Nov. 1923, pp. 197–8.
[30]*The Times*, 16, 20 Nov. 1923; *National Review*, Jan. 1924, p. 655.
[31]*The Times*, 23 Nov. 1923.
[32]See C. Brand, *British Labour's Rise to Power* (Stanford University, Calif., 1941), p. 256, and *The Times*, 27, 28 Nov. 1923.
[33]*Report of the Annual Conference, 1924*, p. 74.

[34]ibid., p. 11; G. D. H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), p. 153.
[35]G. T. Garratt, in *Life and Letters*, Jan. 1924, p. 106.
[36]*Daily Herald*, 14 Nov. 1923; *The Times*, 16–23 Nov. 1923.
[37]See, e.g., G. R. Stirling Taylor in *Nineteenth Century*, Dec. 1923, pp. 793–803.
[38]*New Leader*, 30 Nov. 1923.

V

RESULTS OF THE ELECTION OF 1923
A House Divided

THE 1923 campaign was energetic but unimpassioned. The tariff controversy was perhaps too worn a theme to stir many hearts. Yet it is strange that in the face of almost universal uncertainty as to the probable outcome of the election, there was so little excitement. *The Times*, after a careful survey, thought Baldwin would have a majority of from twenty-seven to fifty-nine seats.[1] Some others were less sure. The *Nation*, greatly daring, even thought that the voters might realize that "the resurgent Liberal Party is the safe and natural rallying point for all Free Traders", and added that the Liberals were "obviously in a position to form an Administration far more able and experienced than that at present in office".[2] More often, Liberals were content to speculate on their chances of overtaking Labour and thus recapturing the role of official Opposition. *Outlook*, the *Nation*, and the *New Statesman* all thought this likely; *The Times* thought not. Labourites expressed confidence in public; privately some had grave doubts. No Labourite seems to have predicted more than 200 seats for his party.[3]

It is even said that MacDonald himself first thought of the possibility of a minority Labour Government as he drove around his constituency after the declaration of the poll; he is supposed to have dashed off to telegraph Henderson for a meeting at which this unforeseen development might be discussed.[4] Mrs. Webb noted on 3 January: "So far as I know, no member of the Labour Party, certainly not any Front Bench man, foresaw the possibility of a Labour Government arising out of the election." They had expected either a clear Tory majority, or a Tory-Liberal coalition.[5] Other observers were similarly short-sighted, which helps to explain how so routine a campaign

could produce so sensational a result; people found it difficult to believe, when all was said and done, that the Conservative Government would not survive the election; and when it did not, the shock was the greater for having been unexpected.

The actual results, in terms of Members elected to Parliament, were a drastic change indeed. The outgoing House of Commons contained 346 Conservatives, 144 Labourites, 117 Liberals, and 8 others; the new one counted but 259 Conservatives, 191 Labourites, 159 Liberals, and 6 others. From being in a majority of 77, the Government found itself in a minority of 97. It had won 15 seats from Liberals, largely by capturing National Liberal strongholds, and 3 from Labour, but these were poor compensation for its losses: 67 to the Liberals, 40 to Labour. The Liberals could be cheered by this exchange with the Tories, but with Labour their score was less satisfactory: 11 gains, 21 losses. Labour, then, was the only party to gain at everyone else's expense: a net gain of 37 from the Government and 10 from the Liberals.

Despite this general upheaval in Parliamentary representation, the popular vote showed remarkably little change from 1922:

	1922	1923
Conservatives	5,599,122	5,483,277
All Liberals	4,113,012	4,299,121
Labour	4,235,457	4,356,767
Other	220,881	318,320

Thus the Tories had lost 115,845; the Liberals gained 186,109; and Labour gained 121,310.*

Nor did the personnel of Parliament change very much. Of the new Members, 421 had sat in the preceding House. Sir Montague Barlow, Minister of Labour, was the one major Tory casualty;† Arthur Henderson, ever unlucky in elections, the

*As David Butler, *Electoral System in Britain, 1918–51* (Oxford, 1953), p. 177, points out, however, the Tories' losses would have been much greater had they not contested sixty-four more seats in 1923 than in 1922.

†Sir Robert Sanders, Minister of Agriculture, and Captain Walter Elliott, Under-Secretary of Health for Scotland, were also beaten.

chief Labour victim. Only among the Liberals were there serious losses, and those almost entirely from the Lloyd George wing: Winston Churchill, beaten by Pethick Lawrence at Leicester, Sir Alfred Mond, Sir Hamar Greenwood, Hilton Young, Charles McCurdy, and others. One further change is worth mentioning: the rise in the number of women M.P.s from two to eight.

The losses among the ex-National Liberals meant a shift to the Left in Liberalism's centre of gravity. The Parliamentary Labour Party changed complexion, too. While Members sponsored by trade unions were increased from 85 to 98, those nominated by divisional Labour Parties went up from 19 to 35, and the candidates of the Socialist Societies elected went from 34 to 52.[6] This meant a perceptible shift to the Left, and a strengthening of the middle class and intellectual elements, as opposed to the traditional mass of retired trade union secretaries. Thus was continued the process which had been so startling a feature of the 1922 election.

Labour's big gains came in the London area in 1923, as they had come in Scotland the previous year. In the County of London, the number of Labour Members increased from 9 to 22; in the suburbs, from 7 to 15.[7] Here were close to half the party's gains. Labour showed other signs of becoming more nearly a National party: increases of 6 Members each were registered in the East Midlands and the Eastern Counties, and of 5 each in the Lancashire and Cheshire area and in Scotland. The only net loss was in North-east England, where the representation slipped from 17 to 14 Members.

Thus Labour had a commanding lead over either opposing party in Scotland (especially in the boroughs) and in the Welsh boroughs; was competing on even terms, or rapidly approaching it, with the Tories in London and in the English boroughs, and with the Liberals in the Welsh counties. Only in the English counties, where the Conservatives still numbered 112, the Liberals 67, and Labour only 50, and in the Universities and Northern Ireland, where Labour counted for almost nothing, did the party remain at a severe disadvantage.

Needless to say, opinions varied as to what the true results of the election were and why they had come about. Conservatives were filled with despair. One journal, commenting on Bonar Law's demise, said: "The dead are indeed happy. It is the living who have to mourn the cruel straits to which the Conservative Party, and with it their best hopes for the country, have been reduced."[8] Many attributed the debacle to the whole election strategy; others singled out individual Tory blunders. One journal bluntly blamed "a barrage of Cobdenite lying we had not time to overcome",[9] and almost all who set pen to paper blamed the activities of the Beaverbrook-Rothermere press.[10] *Blackwood's* lashed out at the democracy itself, which "cares for nothing save for the filling of its own belly. . . . For, in truth, there is no question upon which the democracy is invited to vote that it understands."[11]

Liberals, meanwhile, put as bold a front as possible on the party's failure to alter its relative position in the body politic. Typically, some Liberals found satisfaction at the expense of others: the *Nation* rejoiced at the relative gains of the Radical wing of the party, as against the ex-Coalitionists. W M. R. Pringle, famed in the House as a manipulator of Parliamentary procedure, resorted to statistical sleight of hand; he simply omitted the National Liberals from the party's total in the 1918 and 1922 Parliaments, while counting all Liberals in the 1923 figure; thus Labour's rise pales into insignificance beside the upsurge of Liberalism from a mere 28 Members in 1918, to 60 in 1922, and now 160.[12] In reality, the party had to face the fact that its great drive to reassert itself had fallen far short of the goal, and that its one clear triumph was the acquisition from the Tories of some 39 seats in the Southern and Midland counties, and Manchester, most of them by very narrow margins. The big efforts to make inroads in such former Liberal strongholds as the industrial North, others of the Midland towns, and central and southern Scotland, either produced very modest results or actual losses.[13] It is not surprising, then, if Liberals in their desperation adopted the risky tactic of accepting responsibility in advance for the actions of others: thus Pringle again:

> It is the chief irony of the Election that though the Liberal programme was that upon which there was the largest measure of agreement among the electors, the party is third in numerical strength in the House of Commons. But it holds the balance. Be the life of the new Parliament long or short, whoever is in office, the Liberal Party will be in power.[14]

What the Liberals were at pains to discount, the Labour Party could contemplate with joy. In the amazement and feverish excitement engendered by the prospect of holding office, and by the doubts that surrounded that prospect, relatively little attention could be spared for analysis of what had happened on 6 December. True to its tradition of viewing an election as but one more step in its "inexorable advance",[15] Labour contented itself in the main with pitying poor Baldwin's alleged stupidity in bringing on the contest, pausing occasionally to curse the Liberals for such anti-Labour alliances as those which defeated Henderson and C. R. Buxton. The professionals were especially pleased at the solidity of Labour's gains. Whereas in 1922 Labour had had 76 seats to defend and had lost 19, this time it had held all but 16 out of 144—and all but 3 of the 16 losses were blamed on "local compacts between Liberals and Conservatives".[16]

Why had the election produced these surprising and somewhat puzzling results? At the time, experts were sadly divided. Most felt that the tactic of a sudden, rush election on tariffs had hurt the Tories,[17] but even here it was sometimes argued that the protectionists had in fact benefited by such shock tactics.[18] One interpreter boiled it down to a question of which of two arguments, both seemingly self-evident to the unsophisticated elector, carried the most weight with him: one was "the simple idea that if you kept the foreigner's goods out there would be more work at home", and the other was "that taxes meant a rise in prices".[19] This may well have been true, and the decision in favour of free trade may have been reached by many voters largely from innate conservatism.[20] To adopt protection meant a new departure. Thus we have the intriguing likelihood that right wing instincts played a crucial part in the left wing triumphs of 1923.

But none of this helps to explain the really important result of the contest, Labour's success in fighting off all challenges and maintaining its progress towards a majority. A decision among the three parties could not be determined on the basis of Tariffs policy alone, for Labour and the Liberals occupied essentially the same position on this issue. First, while Liberals and Conservatives traded a few voters between themselves, neither seems to have attracted any significant new help, either from Labour or from previously uncultivated areas of the political landscape. Any additions to the Liberal vote that did not come from Tory Free Traders can be accounted for by Liberals who had refused to vote in the 1922 election because of the internecine warfare then raging in the party.[21]

Second, it is clear that no real decision was reached among the three parties. The turnover in popular vote was small, as we have seen. In the House of Commons, it made a somewhat braver showing, and Labour, which had gained less in the popular vote than the Liberals, gained a bit more in number of Members elected.

And so it was as if two separate electoral struggles were going on simultaneously in 1923. In one, Liberals and Conservatives fought out the old issue of protection versus free trade, and the result was a gain for the Liberals and a check for the Tories. To Labour, meanwhile, the election was but another episode in the long campaign to replace the Liberals and become the alternative governing party to the Conservatives. The result was a modest gain for Labour, probably attained by the help of new voters, plus a few more converts from Liberalism. It was a gain won on the strength of the party's general appeal, its "whole social outlook", as the *New Statesman* had suggested during the campaign.[22] By itself, it would have created no great excitement. But pooled with the attrition to which the Government's majority was subjected in its struggle with the Liberals, Labour's routine gains were enough to catapult the party into office.

Making statistical sense out of elections in this period of real three-party politics is difficult. One complicating factor is the Liberal split; in 1922 four-way contests were not unknown.

Usually both Liberal and National Liberal can simply be counted as "Liberal" in comparing 1922 to the two subsequent elections, but even so there is some distortion involved. The surviving two-Member constituencies further complicate the picture; in this study they have been reluctantly omitted unless otherwise noted. The greatest difficulty comes in estimating the effect of third-party interventions and abstentions. When Labour abandons a three-way fight, it can generally be assumed that most of the benefit will go to the Liberal candidate, and the same with a Tory abstention; but what will be the result when the Liberal is the one who withdraws? The Liberal Party did not disintegrate uniformly, and the analyst must therefore be wary.*

The pattern of 1923 begins to emerge when we consider those constituencies where straight fights took place between the same two parties in both 1922 and 1923, and where the distorting influence of new interventions or abstentions was therefore missing. In 64 constituencies, Liberals and Tories fought by themselves in both years. Forty-two seats remained constant, 27 Conservative, 15 Liberal; in 3 cases a Conservative won in 1923 where his party had lost the previous year, but in 19 cases the roles were reversed and the Tory lost his seat. In the 55 places where Labour and Conservative fought straight fights in both years, there were 22 solidly Conservative seats and 20 solidly Labour. The 13 others all turned out Tory Members and elected Labourites in 1923. There remain the 29 cases of Liberal-Labour rivalries.† Of these, 11 resulted in Labour victories both years and 6 in Liberal, while 6 shifted from Liberal to Labour, and 6 from Labour to Liberal. But two of the Liberal gains were won by less than 200 votes, and two more

*The author has examined the vote for 1922, 1923 and 1924 in each constituency, and come to his own conclusion as to the effect of each withdrawal or intervention, having regard to such things as the margins of victory, the size of the intervening or withdrawing vote, etc. There is unhappily no single criterion, nor set of criteria, by which one can determine with certainty whether or not a change in the number of contesting parties decisively affected the outcome in any given contest. More often than not, however, the effect or lack of effect is fairly apparent.

†Includes five seats where Labour fought both a National Liberal and an Asquithian in 1922, and a reunited Liberal in 1923.

were in places where the National Liberal and Liberal total poll had exceeded Labour's in 1922; in only 8 of the 29 cases did the Liberal candidate in 1923 fare relatively better (whether winner or loser) than in 1922. In all the remaining 21, Labour either widened the margin of victory or narrowed the Liberal advantage.

A further tell-tale sign of Liberal weakness may be seen in the cases where the Conservative vote actually increased in the midst of Tory adversity in 1923. There were 50 such constituencies.* In 24 of these, the Tory had both Liberal and Labour opponents, but many of these were places which Labour was entering for the first time, making a "propaganda fight" and not expecting to poll seriously. In 22 cases, the Tory candidate was faced by a Liberal alone; in only 3 by a Labourite alone.† Apparently, Liberals held the line less successfully than Labour.

Now what voting trends can be discerned among the shiftings between straight fights and three-cornered contests? In 62 constituencies, a three-way fight in 1922 was followed by a straight fight the next year.‡ In 16 of the 62, it was the Conservative who abandoned the contest; in 20 it was Labour, and in 26 the Liberals. Neither Liberals nor Labour abandoned any contest in which they had not been at the bottom of the poll in 1922; clearly neither party was inclined to help the other except where it could be done with minimal self-sacrifice. Eleven of the 16 Tory withdrawals had also come from the bottom of the 1922 poll. So in only 5 of the 62 withdrawals in 1923 was there any substantial degree of quixotry (or nobility of sacrifice) involved, and these were all Tory moves to "keep Labour out".

In so far as can be determined by study of the gross statistics, neither Tory nor Liberal withdrawals had very much effect on the total election results. In only 4 cases it is clear that Tory

*Only comparable examples are counted: e.g. where there was a three-way fight in 1922 and a straight fight in 1923, the case is excluded, since the odds favour each of the two remaining contestants receiving an increased poll in 1923. In 240 cases where comparison is possible the Conservative vote declined in 1923; thus in somewhat more than one out of six constituencies, the Tories managed to add to their poll.

†And in one by an Independent.

‡Includes only those in which the three major parties participated in 1922. National Liberal and Liberal here counted as one party.

abstention affected the outcome decisively, producing Liberal gains at the expense of Labour. Again, but 2 of the 26 Liberal withdrawals appear to have been decisive: in one case enabling Labour to win a seat from the Tories, in another the reverse. Labour withdrawals had a far more striking impact: of the 20, no less than 17 resulted in Liberal gains from the Conservatives, and in 16 of these the withdrawal of the Labourite was clearly a decisive factor. The Tories held only one of the 20; the remaining 2 were Liberal in both years.

Clearly, while the Liberals could be greatly helped by Labour abstentions, their own withdrawals had much less effect. The average drop in total poll, in the 26 constituencies where Liberals withdrew, was about 2,500 per seat. The average Liberal vote in these contests in 1922 had been 4,700; this suggests that more than half the Liberals simply stayed at home in 1923. The distribution of ex-Liberal votes seems to have varied greatly from place to place. In the Buckingham Division of Bucks, Labour's poll shot up by 4,500; at Newcastle, Central, it plummeted by 1,300; the Tories gained 3,000 votes at Wansbeck, Northumberland, while dropping 1,100 at St. Rollox, Glasgow. But in 20 cases out of 26, Labour gained relatively over the Tories, by an average of 1,100 votes per seat. Often the two parties kept pace fairly closely; in 15 out of 26 cases, neither party gained as much as 1,000 votes over the other. Of the 6 heaviest gains, by either party, 4 came in places where the benefiting party was still the loser: these were probably cases of the minority parties in a constituency combining forces in a vain effort to dislodge the entrenched incumbent. For the rest, Liberal abstention seems to have left the situation very much what it would have been had the Liberals never existed; Labour gains in these 26 cases resemble closely the Labour gains in constituencies where there were Tory-Labour straight fights in both years.

Now for the 88 cases where there had been a straight fight in 1922, and the entry of a third party made it three-cornered in 1923. Where the intervening candidate was a Conservative, he captured first or second place in 75 per cent of the cases; Liberal and Labour interventions only avoided the bottom of

the poll in 36 and 25 per cent of the cases, respectively. This circumstance gave colour to the charges and counter-charges of frivolous or malevolent candidacies, but Labour, at least, could plead that a young and expanding party must start somewhere.

It is even more difficult in the case of a third party intervention than it was in the case of a withdrawal of one party, to tell whether or not the change has decisively affected the outcome. For one thing, although the average vote won by the intervening party in 1923 was almost 6,400, the total vote polled in these constituencies increased by an average of just over 1,000 per seat. Apparently the main effect of an intervention was to redistribute the votes, rather than to bring forth voters who had previously stayed at home through lack of a candidate to their liking. Indeed, in nearly one-fifth of these cases, the total poll actually declined in 1923, despite the addition of a third party. Nor is it even safe to assume that a Liberal intervention would necessarily decrease the Labour vote; in almost one-fifth of the Liberal interventions, the Labour vote increased anyhow. Even more striking is the fact that the Labour vote declined in over three-quarters of the cases of Conservative intervention. This suggests that the intervention of a third party did not simply create a split in whichever of the other two parties was closest in the political spectrum—a Tory intervention splitting the Liberal vote while leaving Labour untouched, for instance—but tended instead to cut into the vote of all contestants, and, in a way, to create a new situation altogether. In only 19 cases out of 88 did *any* party that contested in 1922 manage to increase its vote after a third party intervention in the following year.*

Despite these uncertainties, it seems possible to say that in at least 26, and perhaps as many as 34 cases, an intervention of the kind we are discussing did exercise a decisive influence upon the outcome of the struggle. Of these, 13 to 18 were places where Conservatives retained seats which they would otherwise have lost. In another 4, a Tory intervener actually won the seat from a Liberal incumbent—of the decisiveness of these

*In thirteen of these nineteen, it was Labour that gained; in two more, Labour came within less than sixty votes of gaining over 1922.

interventions there can at least be no question. Labour owed the capture of 8 to 10 new seats to interventions, and kept one which it might otherwise have lost. The Liberals, however, seem to have benefited in but a single case, by gaining a seat from the Tories. Thus, of the 8 possible and 26 clear-cut cases of decisive intervention, the Conservatives were the beneficiaries in 22, most of them defensive successes; Labour benefited in 11, and the Liberals in only one. Interventions cost the Liberals 10 seats held by them before the election; they cost the Conservatives between 3 and 5; Labour lost none.

The contrast between the effects of a change from three-way to straight fight, and those of the opposite change, is striking. The Liberals gained heavily in the wake of Labour withdrawals, and lost heavily where a third party entered the fray. This meant that retention of these gains in the future was likely to be dependent upon Labour's acquiescence, and that little was to be expected from Liberal invasions of further straight fights, except the negative product of maintaining a few more Conservatives in their seats than would otherwise have survived.

The only compensation for Liberals was the fact that much of their party's weakness was concentrated in the Lloyd Georgian wing. Asquithians could interpret this as indicating the relative strength of "true" Liberalism, and attribute the fate of the former National Liberals to their too recent sinful collaboration with the Tories. Thus reasoned those who were anxious to see in the phenomenon of National Liberalism a cause, rather than a symptom, of the party's ills.

But the ominous feature of the carnage among the Lloyd Georgians was the number of cases in which Labour had played the role of executioner (or of heir, depending upon one's viewpoint). Of the 52 Members of the 1922 Parliament listed as National Liberals in Dod, exactly half lost their seats in 1923. And 19 of the 26 were lost to Labour. At the Loughborough Division of Leicestershire, Labour came within 800 votes of taking a seat that had been held by a National Liberal unopposed in the previous election. Perhaps, as many Liberals thought, the amputation of that part of their party's body which

had become infected with Coalitionism was a necessary operation. But it was a most serious bit of surgery to undergo, and it left Liberalism in a state of uncertain convalescence just when it would need all its strength to survive the rigours of life in a Minority Parliament, under a socialist administration.

NOTES

[1]*The Times*, 3 Dec. 1923.
[2]*Nation*, 1 Dec. 1923, p. 331.
[3]*Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1912–24*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1952), pp. 248 and 250 (27 Oct. and 19 Nov. 1923); Labour Party leaflet, "Election News", 22 Nov. 1923.
[4]M. A. Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson* (London, 1938), p. 235.
[5]*Diaries, 1912–24*, p. 257.
[6]G. D. H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), p. 155.
[7]ibid., p. 153, for figures on the party's performance by areas.
[8]*Fortnightly Review*, Feb. 1924, p. 183.
[9]*National Review*, Jan. 1924, p. 639.
[10]See, e.g., ibid., p. 637, and *Contemporary Review*, Jan. 1924, pp. 1–4
[11]*Blackwood's Magazine*, Jan. 1924, pp. 132–3.
[12]*Nation*, 15 Dec. 1923, p. 419; *Contemporary Review*, Jan. 1924, p. 8.
[13]See *Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1924, pp. 220–3.
[14]*Contemporary Review*, Jan. 1924, p. 9.
[15]Arthur Ponsonby, in ibid., p. 11.
[16]Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference, 1924*, National Agent's report, p. 13.
[17]*Review of Reviews*, Dec. 1923, pp. 381–8; *Contemporary Review*, Jan. 1924, pp. 13–18; *Outlook*, 15 Dec. 1923, p. 438.
[18]A. G. Gardiner in the *Nation*, 8 Dec. 1923 p. 369.
[19]ibid., p. 370.
[20]J. A. R. Marriott, historian and protectionist M.P., in *Fortnightly Review*, Jan. 1924, p. 117.
[21]See *Outlook*, 15 Dec. 1923, p. 437.
[22]*New Statesman*, 1 Dec. 1923, p. 234.

VI

THE PATH TO OFFICE

When Britain rubbed her eyes and awakened to the fact that the result of her electoral indecisiveness was very likely to be a Labour Government, some of her citizens succumbed to panic at the prospect. It is difficult to recapture the horror with which they foresaw the attainment of office by a party which had given such evidences of its moderation, and which was outnumbered by more than three to one in the House of Commons. The *English Review* was not alone in adopting a tone of Apocalyptic woe:

> We stand now at a moment when the sun of England seems menaced with final eclipse. For the first time in her history the party of revolution approach their hands to the helm of the state, not only, as in the 17th Century, for the purpose of overthrowing the Crown, or of altering the Constitution, but with the design of destroying the very bases of civilised life.[1]

Another observer saw Labour as "supported by foreign gold and pledged to take its orders from an international society, to put the war of classes above the safety of the Empire", while a third foresaw "the unspeakable humiliation of an anti-national government . . . able to plot and plan from the vantage ground of Downing Street".[2]

Leaders in the Cassandra chorus were those same organs of the syndicated press which, by undermining Baldwin's campaign, had helped bring about the situation that now seemed so terrifying. The *Daily Mail* enlisted the aid of a Professor of Constitutional Law, J. H. Morgan of the University of London, to write on what a socialist Government could do to subvert the State by administrative revolution without ever resorting to legislation. Of course, the anti-socialist majority in Parliament might move to stop this administrative nightmare; said the

Professor blandly, he *assumed* "no concerted effort . . . by the other two parties to turn a Labour Ministry out".[3]

Many sections of the press not known for their sympathy towards Labour did manage to keep their heads. *Punch*, taking the long view, spoke of "the strange turn of events by which another stage has been reached in the unending English revolution that has been going on since the seventeenth century". By such an appeal to history, and a restraint in the use of capital letters, no doubt a soothing effect was achieved. The *Economist* thought that ". . . it would be, on the whole, a National advantage for the Labour Party to try its prentice hand at governing the country". Responsibility would temper its Utopian views. Labour was a constitutional party; besides, it had "neither the backing in the House nor the experience of administration to be able to order a general advance along the road to Socialism".[4]

It is hard to say just how widespread and how genuine was the panic over the possibility of a Labour Government. There was the famous cry from the heart of the defeated Liberal candidate for West Leicester, Winston Churchill: "The enthronement in office of a Socialist Government will be a serious national misfortune such as has usually befallen great States only on the morrow of defeat in war."[5] There was the oft-cited appeal to Baldwin from the City of London Conservative Association, urging him to support a Liberal Government if the Liberals would not support a Tory one.[6] Asquith indicated that the leaders of the anti-socialist parties were bombarded by their nervous constituents, demanding some arrangement that would exorcize the peril. But it is permissible to suspect that some, at least, of the fright may have been synthetic. The *Daily Mail* was spreading the alarm on 14 January, as noted above. Nine days later, the day after MacDonald had kissed hands as Prime Minister, the same paper suggested, with complete calm, that Labour's new Premier inaugurate a real economy drive in government (as opposed to the "lip service" given hitherto), cutting foreign commitments and defence expenditures and reducing Ministerial salaries. Surely the *Mail*'s fears cannot all have been cured by one day of Labour in office.

It was as much the complete uncertainty of the situation that produced fear and uneasiness as any concrete worries about Labour and its capital levy.[7] The fact is that Britain suddenly found herself confronted by two great unknown factors. A new and untried political party was within reach of office for the first time. Simultaneously, an absolutely unparalleled constitutional situation had to be faced.* Was the Baldwin Ministry to resign immediately, considering itself repudiated because it had lost its majority, even though it remained much the largest single party? If it did resign, or was defeated in the House of Commons, what was to take its place? Was there to be some new coalition, despite the obvious distaste for coalitions among Britishers of all political faiths at this time? If not, how was a minority government, formed of any one party, to carry on its business in the House without some formal arrangement with at least one of its rivals? And was such a minority government to be in possession of all the normal powers and prerogatives of His Majesty's advisers, including, for instance, the right to be granted a Dissolution whenever they chose?

Baldwin's first impulse was to resign immediately. From this the King and various colleagues dissuaded him.[8] Constitutionally, this was a reversion to earlier practice; before Disraeli's resignation in 1868, no Government had ever abandoned office immediately upon defeat at the polls.[9] To some Conservatives, it seemed desirable not to let Labour in until Parliament was in session to keep tabs on the Cabinet. Retention of office by Baldwin would give the country a little time to adjust itself to the new situation, to regain its political composure. And it would force the Liberals to bear public responsibility for putting Labour into office, by voting the Tories out.

The pressure upon Tories and Liberals alike to avert this by joining forces, either in a coalition or by some tacit arrangement, was strong for a while. Balfour suggested that Baldwin negotiate for Liberal support to continue in office; Lord Long of Wraxhall that the Tories offer to support an Asquith Government.[10]

*Governments had lacked majorities before, but never had there been a situation so close to equilibrium among three clearly defined and organized National parties.

Churchill, after denouncing "faction and manoeuvre", proposed an ingenious manoeuvre of his own: the House of Commons should send an address to the Crown incorporating both Labour's motion of censure on the Baldwin Government and a further motion repudiating socialism. This, said Churchill, would extricate the Crown from any charge of improper intervention against Labour; in refusing to "enthrone" a Labour Government under these circumstances, the King would simply be following the recommendations of Parliament.[11]

Churchill did not indicate what sort of Government would then take over. Various possible coalitions were canvassed by others, however, to be headed either by a Conservative not associated with the ill-fated Baldwin régime (Balfour, perhaps, or Austen Chamberlain), or by a Liberal of the Right (Asquith or Grey). Alternatively, a non-party Government of "caretakers" was suggested, to exclude top leaders of all three parties. In the confusion of the day, experienced journalists conjured up visions of a three-party coalition, to hold the fort while urgent problems of European settlement were solved. To lead such a Cabinet, Wickham Steed thought Lord Grey "would be the most generally acceptable",[12] forgetting perhaps that Labourites considered Grey a principal author of the European tangle which this Government was supposedly to unravel.

But all such schemes were ephemeral. Neither the public nor the parties wanted any return to Coalitionism. Some certainly feared even a minority Labour Government, but those experienced in the ways of Parliament, and familiar at first hand with the personal characteristics of such Labour Front Bench men as Snowden, Thomas, and MacDonald, not to mention the solid and respectable trade unionists, knew perfectly well how little risk attended the ascension to the Cabinet of such men in such a Parliamentary position. Bourgeois nerves were soothed by the comforting reminder that the Labour men had enjoyed "a sound business experience in the management of the trade unions".[13] Behind the scenes, Neville Chamberlain put it more bluntly: a Labour Government "would be too weak to do much harm but not too weak to get discredited".[14] The more perceptive Conservatives realized that their party was bound to be

the beneficiary when the discrediting of Labour took place; besides, even some of the most extreme Tories plainly feared a return to Welsh Wizardry even more than they feared the advent of a Labour Government.[15]

As for the Liberals, avoidance of Coalition had become the price of maintaining that party's increasingly fragile individuality. As the *Liberal Magazine* put it:

> . . . there are no conceivable circumstances in which the Liberal Party could enter into a coalition, alliance, partnership, understanding, or other collusive arrangement of any kind or for any purpose, with the Conservative Party. Liberals are not separated from Conservatives merely by a difference in the way of doing things, nor by divergent judgments as to how far it may be safe or practicable to go at a particular time. They are separated in their fundamental aims, in thought, in idea, in principle; and there is neither any event nor any formula that can ever bridge this gulf.[16]

For the champions of free trade to have joined hands with the champions of protection on the morrow of the contest over this very issue would have been objectionable to both sides in any case. But for the Liberals, independence was a matter of life and death. Supporters of Coalition among them, then, were people like Churchill who did not view the death of the party as too high a price to pay for safety from the socialists.

It was not long before supporters of "keeping Labour out" were wilting under what was perhaps the strongest argument of all: that in the long run it was Labour that stood to gain from any such seeming martyrdom at the hands of the propertied classes. The mere rumours of possible coalitions sufficed to elicit from Labour's leaders some foretaste of this. MacDonald, speaking at Elgin on 22 December, voiced his "suspicion that between now and January 5 or 8 there was going to be a serious attempt made to wangle the Constitution so that the democracy of this country might not have fair play given to them".[17]

But on 18 December, speaking to the Liberal Parliamentary Party at the National Liberal Club, Asquith had put all real doubts to rest.[18] The old man was in his best form. The Tories,

he remarked, had got in the habit of considering him "a back number, an extinct volcano, an effete and discredited dotard"; in view of this, he continued with a twinkle, "It is, I will not say a gratifying, but it is an exhilarating experience for me to find myself now acclaimed (cheers) from the same quarters (cheers) as a potential saviour of society (cheers)." But those who saw him in such a role were doomed to disappointment. He poured scorn on the idea that the Liberals should be shifted about like "a horde of mercenaries" to form some coalition or other. Besides, he had received no overtures from any other party. When Parliament met, the Baldwin Government would go, "and they will go with short shrift". He assumed that the King would then summon Ramsay MacDonald, and a Labour Government would be formed.*

There were those who feared this development, Asquith continued. "This may reassure some trembling minds outside—if a Labour Government is ever to be tried in this country, as it will be, sooner or later, it could hardly be tried under safer conditions." For, whatever party is in office during this Parliament, "it is we, if we really understand our business, who really control the situation".

Nor would that control necessarily remain an informal, behind-the-scenes matter. Here Asquith lifted the Constitutional curtain a trifle, and allowed his followers an intoxicating glimpse of future possibilities. "The Crown," said he, "is not bound to take the advice of a particular Minister to put its subjects to the tumult and turmoil of a series of General Elections so long as it can find other Ministers who are prepared to give it a trial." The power to obtain a Dissolution of Parliament did not rest, in short, with a Prime Minister who could claim only 31 per cent of the House of Commons as his supporters. What Asquith was saying, in his somewhat Olympian way, had been more simply expressed by one of his followers a few days earlier; Labour was to have its chance, but if it failed, "rather than an election in the New Year the Government will almost certainly devolve into the safe hands

*And so he recommended to George V, when consulted; the King did not ask Baldwin for an opinion. Nicolson, *George V*, pp. 383–4.

of Mr. Asquith; and the country will breathe a sigh of relief".[19]

Here was a masterly solution to the Liberals' cruel dilemma. The bitter pill of having to support the upstart Labourites in office was coated with the vision of a Liberal Government to follow. It was perhaps a bit too masterly, in fact. The outcry, not only from Labour but from Conservatives such as J. L. Garvin, was immediate. Even the *Manchester Guardian* regretfully concluded that the idea, while aimed at the desirable end of avoiding a series of snap elections, rested on a mistaken interpretation of proper Constitutional usages.*

The controversy is important here chiefly as an illustration of the instability of the whole position. The Liberal *Nation* expressed the hope that its party would refrain from tactical obstruction of the Labour Government's programme, and that Labour, should it fall from office, would then give to a Liberal Government the same fair chance to develop its policy.[20] Such a picture of politics as practised in Never-Never Land, with a considerate and grateful Labour Party offering its rivals the chance to make good where it had had to admit failure itself, shows that many Liberals faced the difficult situation then unfolding with a minimum of realism. Labour, in the meanwhile, was merely antagonized by Asquith's tactless reminder that the new Government could live only in Liberal leading strings.

Many Labourites would secretly have welcomed a Tory-Liberal Coalition. Before the election, Beatrice Webb considered it the best possible outcome for Labour; Philip Snowden had written that the party should "force a Liberal-Conservative Coalition" in the event of a Parliament without a majority.[21] This was the implied goal of all those Labourites who, after the election, were opposed to the party's taking office, since the obvious alternative to Labour-in-office was some sort of anti-Labour alliance. Such a thought was perhaps only natural in a party which had spent all its life up to that time

**Manchester Guardian,* 22 Dec. 1923. Eugene A. Forsey, *Royal Power of Dissolution of Parliament in the British Commonwealth* (Toronto, 1943), pp. 106–19, tends to support Asquith, but his discussion is rather theoretical, giving slight attention to the specific context of 1923. Asquith was a great Constitutional lawyer, but he was also a party leader in a tight situation. See Forsey, pp. 89ff, for discussion of various other views on the question.

as a propagandist movement. Such disparate figures as David Kirkwood, Robert Smillie, and Pethick Lawrence were initially opposed to taking office.[22] No doubt their idea was not to dodge responsibility, but to clarify the issue between Labour and "the rest". But this view could not prevail. From the start, Arthur Henderson urged acceptance of office. At a dinner in the Webbs' home, the six top leaders cast the die. Beatrice Webb noted: "Sidney reports that they have all, except Henderson, 'cold feet' at the thought of office, though all of them believe that J.R.M. ought not to refuse." Snowden's account agrees; Labour, it was felt, "had no choice" but to accept office, despite all the hazards, for to do otherwise "would obviously have been regarded as an act of cowardice".[23]

Having so decided, the leaders lost no time in carrying their point of view to the movement. Resolutions in favour of taking office if asked were published by both the National Executive of the Labour Party and the General Council of the TUC on 13 December. The top leaders apparently experienced little difficulty in persuading their lieutenants; many, like Pethick Lawrence, were converted at a meeting in London addressed by MacDonald.[24] Besides, as the weeks went by, rank and file enthusiasm for a Labour Government became infectious. The great victory demonstration which was held at the Albert Hall on 8 January 1924 is talked of still by veterans of those days. There was no longer any doubt that there would be a Labour Government. But just what sort of Government, on what terms and for what purpose, remained far from clear.

It would not be based on any coalition with the Liberals. Fear of becoming enmeshed in some such alliance was endemic in the Labour Party. In 1921, an offer by a group of Left-wing Liberals of a combined front against Lloyd George was summarily rejected, though the terms would have included support for nationalization of mines, railways, canals, and electricity.[25] The 1922 Party Conference resolved "against any alliance or electoral arrangement with any section of the Liberal or Conservative Parties".[26] In case their leaders had forgotten these instructions, a conclave of the Glasgow ILP sent MacDonald a telegram saying: "No coalition under any circum-

stances. Labour alone is competent and willing to govern."[27] Their fears were groundless; the Executive's resolution (echoed by the TUC's) called upon the party to "accept full responsibility for the government of the country without compromising itself with any form of coalition".[28] MacDonald's attacks on the Liberals during December, which Snowden thought were designed to bring about an anti-Labour coalition, were more probably aimed at reassuring the Labour supporters as to their leader's fidelity to the one generally accepted thing in all the confusion and flux of the time—the party's determination to avoid the Liberal embrace. Labour's leaders realized that for them to share office with the Liberals would mean a new lease of life to the older party, whereas Labour's attainment of real power was dependent upon the destruction of the Liberals.[29]

Without an alliance with Liberalism, how was the Labour Government to survive? At precisely this point, the thinking of the Labour movement began to be cloudy, and agreement ceased. A fairly sizeable group, centred in but not limited to the Clyde, wanted Labour to take office only to produce a full socialist programme, inviting defeat in the House and another election immediately. The supposed advantage of this scheme was that the election would be fought on the issue of socialism, thereby tending to accelerate the process by which the country regained a two-party system—socialists and anti-socialists. Indications of the degree of realism prevalent among supporters of this view come from James Maxton's assurance that ". . . with a fortnight's rest, [Labour] will be quite fit to fight and capture the 150 seats that are obviously waiting to be seized", and from Tom Johnston's recommendation that Labour fight this election "upon a narrow front", stressing "one or two simple issues, such as measures for the relief of unemployment, nationalization of banks, mines, and railways, widows' pensions, and the amendment of the Old Age Pension Laws . . .".[30]

Yet it had not been long since MacDonald himself had indicated the impossibility of Labour's achieving anything much without a Parliamentary majority. Snowden had gone even farther, arguing that Labour would need not only a Parliamentary majority but a majority in the country "which

understands the Labour programme", a thing that perhaps no political party has ever enjoyed anywhere.[31] H. N. Brailsford and Clifford Allen, both representatives of moderate ILP opinion at this time, feared that even the attempt to accomplish things would lead to buying support "on the only possible terms —by arrangements with the Liberals, which would obscure our socialist policy, compromise our independence, and make us in the end mere caretakers of a capitalist and Imperialist system. If we take office, we must be ready to live dangerously, and to lay it down as boldly and as promptly as we take it up."[32] And Sidney Webb, certainly no Clydesider, objected to moderating any of the Labour Government's programme for the sake of placating the Liberals, let alone governing by agreement with them on a specified policy.[33]

Undoubtedly there were mixed motives behind these pleas that the Labour Government, far from worrying about how to survive, should abjure survival at all costs. There was often the instinctive reaction of idealists to any suggestion that they abandon Utopia for the sake of a few amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Acts. But there was also a real appreciation of the risks to a party pledged to sweeping, revolutionary alterations in the social and economic structure of the country, of getting mixed up in the expediencies and short-term considerations of three-party horse-trading in a minority Parliament.

The proponents of a bold socialist demonstration and a quick exit were primarily concerned with the preservation of the party's soul, and with its reputation with the crusaders in its own ranks. The followers of MacDonald, meanwhile, were concentrating on the movement's bodily health, and its reputation with the great mass of non-socialist electors. MacDonald told the victory celebration at the Albert Hall, "We are not going to undertake office in order to prepare for a General Election. We are going to take office in order to do work." The Government, said T. E. Naylor, M.P., would advance "the immediate practical proposals contained in our programme."[34] The fact that there were almost as many ideas as to what constituted Labour's "immediate practical proposals" as there were leaders

of the party, and that the next General Election, like it or not, was certain to be a continuing preoccupation of all politicians in the unstable Parliamentary situation that prevailed, was kept in the background. The whole tenor of the party leaders' pronouncements was that Labour was proceeding, in as nearly normal fashion as the abnormal situation would allow, into office to tackle the problems facing the nation. Undoubtedly this approach helped calm the public's fears, and did the party no harm by underscoring its sense of public responsibility.

In the general speculation as to what the Labour Government might do, four basic ideas stood out: it might hope to make some legislative progress, within the limits of its Parliamentary position; it would serve as a kind of apprenticeship in the arts of governing for Labour's leaders; it would be a big step towards dishing the Liberals and restoring the two-party system, with Labour as one of the parties; and finally, the mere presence of Labour men in the seats of the mighty would mean a new atmosphere in government, with incalculable good results.

The last point was exaggerated into an illusion, as Beatrice Webb had noted years before. MacDonald was not the only one to argue that unemployment would be alleviated merely by having people in the Labour Department who "will consider the problem of unemployment from the human point of view".[35] Nothing more maddened non-Labour people than this kind of bland assertion, yet its importance is too easily underrated. In so far as it built expectations that Labourite Ministers would be a new species entirely, it made their task more difficult, and a certain amount of disillusionment inevitable. But in late 1923 and early 1924, high expectations helped immeasurably to win support for the idea that it would be worthwhile for Labour to accept office.

In the minds of the party's top leadership, the apprenticeship idea was, in one form or another, probably the main consideration. To some, it simply meant apprenticeship in the technical matters of governing—the routine of running a Department, the technique of Cabinet meetings, the relations between political ministers and their civil servants. To others, it implied surveying the ground for later socialist construction.

As a Government, Labour could get the facts and figures, as well as the experience, which it would eventually use to translate its socialism into practice. Mrs. Webb called it "a scouting expedition in the world of administration—a testing of men and measures before they are actually called to exercise majority power."[36]

But the apprenticeship idea was not an easy one with which to rally the faithful. In its limited, technical sense, it was often despised by Labourites who either discounted the difficulties involved in merely routine government, or felt that it was Labour's mission to do away with all routines and to ignore precedents, rather than learning them. In its broader sense, that of preparing for socialism, it had more appeal, but even here it implied a certain humility about the soundness of the party's programme as it stood. Besides, some of the most vocal members of the movement were, in their heart of hearts, far happier as a critical minority in perennial opposition than as apprentices in political workshops. The result was that the idea of apprenticeship, while most important among the leaders, was far less stressed in public. Officially, the emphasis was rather on the opportunity to disprove the calumny that Labour was "not fit to govern". But the two processes—that of becoming fit to govern and that of proving oneself so—go hand in hand.

Of more appeal to Labour's rank and file was the argument summed up by Clifford Allen in the *New Leader* on 14 December 1923: "If we act wisely it is possible we may be able to seal the fate of the Liberal Party and restore the two-party system in a new form." But the danger in pressing this purpose for taking office too far was also clear: in the same article, Allen hastens to warn that a serious attempt at the solution of national and international problems must take precedence over "manoeuvring for power". Perhaps he meant that they must *seem* to take precedence; Labour must not appear to be using its great opportunity for narrow partisan ends. Already, the *Nation* was asking whether it was Labour's "settled purpose" to destroy Liberalism rather than to govern for the good of the country.[37] Furthermore, the idea of taking office to destroy the Liberals

was hard to reconcile with the idea of using the chance to achieve constructive reforms, for any successes in Parliament would depend on help from these same Liberals.

And it was the possibility of real achievement as a Government which was most loudly and effectively trumpeted forth as the *raison d'être* for accepting the challenge. It was the unanswerable argument: to plead that Labour in office could do nothing to help end Britain's post-war woes was impossible, no matter how unfavourable the Parliamentary odds. This is where MacDonald's attitude was realistic, as compared with that of the proponents of a socialist demonstration. The Labour Party, untroubled by Marxist fears lest any improvement in conditions postpone the day of major changes, accepted with enthusiasm its Leader's vision of a Government which, by limited short-run achievements, would none the less make progress towards a future Utopia. At the Albert Hall, he kept alive his followers' vision of the future while at the same time reminding them of the limitations of the present:

> We are a party that away in the dreamland of imagination dwells in a social organization fairer and more perfect than any organization that mankind has ever known. (Cheers.) That is true, but we are not to jump there. We are going to walk there. . . . "One step enough for me." (Laughter.) One step! Yes, my friends, on one condition —that it leads to the next step. (Cheers.) If we shirk our responsibilities now we should inflict upon ourselves the defeat that our enemies could not inflict on us. So we accept our responsibilities.[38]

The Labour faithful may be forgiven if that night they fell once more under the spell of that mellifluous voice, those magic accents, half Scots, half cultured English, that commanding presence. "He was the most handsome man I have ever known, and his face and bearing can best be described by the conventional term 'princely'," Emanuel Shinwell writes thirty years later.[39] In January 1924 he represented in himself the dramatic rise from the depths that the party had made since 1918; he symbolized the hopes, in many minds and hearts extravagant hopes, for the Ministry which he was about to lead.

NOTES

[1]*English Review*, Jan. 1924, pp. 3–4.
[2]*Blackwood's Magazine*, Feb. 1924, p. 293; *National Review*, Jan. 1924, p. 644.
[3]*Daily Mail*, 14 Jan. 1924; see also *Sunday Times*, 23 Dec. 1923.
[4]*Punch*, 30 Jan. 1924, p. 112; *The Economist*, 15 Dec. 1923, p. 1040.
[5]Letter to *The Times*, 18 Jan. 1924.
[6]*The Times*, 3 Jan. 1924.
[7]See *The Times*, 8, 11 and 20 Dec. 1923, concerning uncertainty in the business world.
[8]See Sir Harold Nicolson, *King George V* (London, 1952), p. 382; G. M. Young, *Stanley Baldwin* (London, 1952), pp. 69–70; L. S. Amery, *My Political Life*, Vol. II: *War and Peace, 1914–29* (London, 1953), p. 287; Sir J. Evelyn Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times* (London, 1955), pp. 223–5.
[9]W. I. Jennings, *Cabinet Government*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1951), p. 7.
[10]Young, *Baldwin*, pp. 69–70. See *Gleanings and Memoranda*, Jan. 1924, pp. 103–4, for similar views of Austen Chamberlain and Birkenhead.
[11]*The Times*, 18 Jan. 1924.
[12]*Review of Reviews*, Dec. 1923, p. 386.
[13]*Sunday Times*, 23 Dec. 1923.
[14]Quoted in Keith Feiling, *Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1946), p. 111.
[15]See the *National Review*, Jan. 1924, pp. 657–9.
[16]*Liberal Magazine*, Dec. 1923, p. 706.
[17]*The Times*, 24 Dec. 1923.
[18]ibid., 19 Dec. 1923.
[19]Captain Reginald Berkeley, M.P., in *Outlook*, 15 Dec. 1923, p. 439.
[20]*Nation*, 15 Dec. 1923, p. 423; see also *Liberal Magazine*, Feb. 1924, p. 66.
[21]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1912–24*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1952), p. 251 (19 Nov. 1923); Snowden, *If Labour Rules* (London, 1923), p. 8.
[22]Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt* (London, 1935), p. 219; Smillie, *My Life for Labour* (London, 1924), p. 304; The Rt. Hon. Lord Pethick Lawrence, interviewed by the author, 29 May 1952.
[23]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1912–24*, p. 255 (12 Dec. 1923); Philip Snowden, *Autobiography* (London, 1934), II, 594–5.
[24]Interview, 29 May 1952; see also Margaret Bondfield, *A Life's Work* (London, 1948), p. 257.
[25]F. W. Jowett in the *Labour Leader*, 13 May 1921, quoted in A. Fenner Brockway, *Socialism Over Sixty Years* (London, 1946), pp. 189–90.
[26]G. D. H. Cole, *History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), p. 126.

[27]*The Times*, 13 Dec. 1923.
[28]ibid.
[29]The Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Trevelyan, Bt., interviewed by the author, 9 June 1952.
[30]*Forward*, 15 Dec. 1923.
[31]MacDonald speech of 27 June 1923, cited in John Scanlon, *Very Foreign Affairs* (London, 1938), p. 89; Snowden, *If Labour Rules*, p. 8.
[32]*New Leader*, 14 Dec. 1923, pp. 3–4.
[33]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1912–24*, p. 255 (12 Dec. 1923).
[34]*The Times*, 9 Jan. 1924, 17 Dec. 1923.
[35]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1912–24*, p. 73 (8 Dec. 1916); MacDonald at the Albert Hall, *The Times*, 9 Jan. 1924.
[36]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1912–24*, p. 256 (12 Dec. 1923).
[37]*Nation*, 22 Dec. 1923, p. 455.
[38]*The Times*, 9 Jan. 1924.
[39]Shinwell, *Conflict Without Malice* (London, 1955), p. 113.

VII

CABINET MAKING

When Parliament met in January, all that was left was to go through the formal motions of bringing the Baldwin Government down and putting the Labour Government in its place. Those who hoped for the best from this experiment listened to MacDonald's Albert Hall speech and were reassured —although the singing of hymns, the *Marseillaise*, and the *Red Flag* at the meeting may have puzzled some who were not previously acquainted with the diverse sources of Labour's inspiration.* Those who feared the worst, on the other hand, listened to Maxton's speech "at the Rouken Glen, a public pleasaunce a few miles from Glasgow", in which he played to perfection his accustomed role of a lightweight Robespierre. How the fearful must have trembled to hear this sallow, cadaverous fellow, with the straight black hair falling over his brow, saying, "The Labour Party might establish a precedent for a Government remaining in office after twenty defeats. . . . The big problem that faced the people who were going to govern was the problem of compelling the wealthy to disgorge their wealth."[1]

On 14 January, Lord Haldane, soon to be Lord Chancellor, held a dinner for the leaders of the party, which he described in a letter to his aged mother: "The King's Speech dinner went off remarkably well. At Bay's [his sister's] suggestion I provided both lemonade and orangeade [in place of wine]. The unofficial cabinet meeting which followed was a remarkable display of

**The Times*, 9 Jan. 1924. At his first interview with MacDonald, King George V expressed his distaste for the *Red Flag*; Labour stalwarts would have blanched to hear the new Premier assuring the King that "they had got into the way of singing this song and it will be by degrees that he hopes to break down this habit." Memorandum by Lord Stamfordham, 22 Jan. 1924, quoted in Sir Harold Nicolson, *King George V* (London, 1952), p. 386.

competence and also of conservatism. I never attended a better cabinet meeting."[2]

In the Debate on the Address that opened the next day, the imminence of Labour's accession to office quickly became the main theme. MacDonald called for fair play for the next Government, and Baldwin pledged that they would get it. Neville Chamberlain warned the Liberals of their responsibility for throwing out a Government with which for the most part they agreed and putting in "a Government whose Socialistic aspirations are directly contrary to everything for which Liberalism stands".[3] Labour's leaders might be moderates, but, he asked, could they control their extremist followers? Plainly the Conservatives were already enjoying their new freedom and their enviable tactical position. Only now and then was a higher note struck, as when L. S. Amery paid tribute to MacDonald and the other Labour pioneers "who have given a life's work to a cause outside themselves", and have now realized what was "a daring dream" thirty years earlier.[4]

The Liberals provided what interest the Debate had. Their leader, Asquith, followed immediately after Clynes had moved a simple "no confidence" amendment to the Address. Asquith's speech was a definitive apologia for ousting the Baldwin Government:

> There may be many theories, I have no doubt there are, why we have been sent here by the electorate in such strange proportions. But there is one theory which will not hold water for a moment: and that is, that we were sent here to maintain the present Government in office. It was their election, not ours. It was they, not we, who threw down the challenge. It was they again, not we, who invited the judgment of the electorate. They have got it. . . .
>
> After a somewhat prolonged experience of public life, though I have known Administrations that I disliked more, and Administrations which have done more actual mischief, I have never known any Administration that, when it had to surrender its stewardship to the Crown, had a smaller balance to its credit, either of achievement or of authority. It would be waste of time to indulge in the

thankless task of reslaying the suicide. On the issue raised by this Amendment judgment goes by default.[5]

A Labour Back-bencher wrote, "I cannot convey to your readers the wit, the humour, and the power in the speech of this wonderful old man."[6] But the moment of Liberal triumph, and even more that of Liberal-Labour mutual sympathy, was short lived. The old idea of a progressive majority co-operating in reform induced fear in many a Liberal, and scorn among Labourites. Herbert Morrison, new to the House but scarcely overawed, taunted the Liberals for claiming that their programme represented the greatest measure of common agreement in the country; the fact was, said he, they *had* no programme. Right-wing Liberals, especially those who had just won straight fights against Labour candidates, clamoured for a chance to vote, not only against the Tory Government, but against socialism as well. General Seely bemoaned the instability of the situation, and foresaw recriminations and accusations of having been stabbed in the back from Labour when the Liberals failed to support a Labour Government blindly. Captain Guest even suggested that the occasion might be the last on which the Liberals would play a major part as a united party.[7]

On 21 January, the vote finally came. There had been rumours of large Liberal defections, but in the event 138 Liberals joined 188 Labourites and two Independents in voting against the Government, and only ten Liberals deserted their whips to vote with the Tories. The next day, Baldwin resigned, and Ramsay MacDonald, son of a farm labourer, who had once dreamed of becoming a great scientist, had supported himself almost all his life by journalism, had been during the war the most widely hated man in Britain, and had probably conceived of the idea of a Labour Government at Westminster earlier and more concretely than any other man, kissed hands as Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury. He had to be sworn of the Privy Council at a special session in order to be able to take his office. The King wrote in his diary that night (22 January 1924): "I had an hour's talk with him, he impressed me very much; he wishes to do the right thing. Today

23 years ago dear Grandmama [Queen Victoria] died. I wonder what she would have thought of a Labour Government!"[8]

There had been ample time for Labour to form a Cabinet. At the meeting of the top leaders at the Webbs' home on 10 December, it was agreed (at Webb's suggestion, according to Snowden) that MacDonald was to have the free rein that is customary for a Prime Minister. MacDonald went off to Lossiemouth to think the problem out. Apparently there was no effort to introduce any innovations such as setting up consultation with the National Executive, or even among the six men present at the Webbs'. On the way home that night, Arthur Henderson expressed some misgivings about leaving it entirely to MacDonald; in the succeeding weeks, Snowden reports that both he and Henderson felt that MacDonald should have been doing the job in London, in consultation with his colleagues, instead of from his seclusion at Lossiemouth. But he says nothing of any effort having been made to persuade MacDonald of this.[9] Thus with hardly a murmur perished the long held Labour hopes of "reforming" the method of Cabinet appointments. Labour behaved in this major respect exactly like its Liberal and Conservative predecessors.[10]

It is not known how MacDonald approached the matter, nor how much advice he did actually seek. General C. B. Thomson, who as Lord Thomson became Secretary for Air, was his golfing companion at Lossiemouth at the time,[11] and was perhaps consulted, at least informally. Before long, letters went out to prospective Ministers. Lord Parmoor, once a Conservative M.P., and a devout Anglican lawyer who had come into MacDonald's orbit through common opposition to the war, and through being one of Beatrice Webb's brothers-in-law, had a letter from MacDonald on Christmas Day; it offered him the Lord Presidency, or, if he preferred, "a more active office like, say, India", in the event a Labour Government were formed. MacDonald added, by way of reassurance, "I want to gain the confidence of the country and shall suit my policy accordingly." Parmoor wrote back, accepting the Lord Presidency; his advice does not appear to have been asked concerning other appointments. The whole

transaction seems to have been relatively quick and formal.[12]

Sidney Webb himself did not hear from MacDonald until New Year's Eve. The letter was very professional and suave:

> Would you take the Ministry of Labour and shoulder the unemployment difficulties? . . . As little legislation as you can do with, please, though you will need some. . . . I should in the ordinary way be inclined to offer you another office, but Labour and the Foreign Office are the two arduous and most important jobs we have to face. I pray of you to consent.[13]

The Webbs heard nothing more for over two weeks. In fact they were so little in touch that the only way in which they could tender advice on appointments to MacDonald was through Haldane; at that, none of the recommendations mentioned by Mrs. Webb in her diary bore fruit. On 17 January, MacDonald sent for Webb, and told him that some of the top people (unspecified) had objected to his getting such a minor post as Minister of Labour; he, MacDonald, had not realized how much it was the "Cinderella of the Government offices"; Webb said that he was perfectly willing to stay there, especially since he had heard that Colonel Wedgwood wanted to be at the Board of Trade; MacDonald insisted on Webb's taking the latter post, and added, "If they were all as considerate as you have been there would not be any difficulty in making a Cabinet."[14]

Parmoor was the passive recipient of MacDonald's overtures, and Webb only slightly less so; by the time Beatrice writes (18 January) of Sidney's finally having talked with MacDonald "about his own post and also about others", it must have been too late to have much effect. In the case of Lord Haldane, however, the picture is notably different. Haldane was a valuable quarry; he had in quantity the experience of Government at the highest levels which was Labour's great lack, and his name would add prestige. As early as 12 December, Haldane wrote: "Later on [11 December] Ramsay MacDonald telephoned urgently for a meeting. In the evening he offered me anything I chose if I would help him; the leadership of the House of

Lords, the Chancellorship, Defence, Education, and the carrying out of my plans. . . . The press is in full cry and Williams [his butler] is keeping them off."[15] Soon afterwards, Haldane reports having received "a message from Baldwin begging me to join the Labour Government and help them out. I will come in on my own terms and have not yet told MacDonald what these are." On 23 December, MacDonald wrote, suggesting several possible offices—Education, the Admiralty, India—and adding, "Perhaps on this you would express your views generally. I have several awkward corners to get round." Haldane, nothing loath, replied at length with advice, largely rather platitudinous, and with mention of his pet plans for reforming the Lord Chancellor's department, improving education, and developing the work of the Committee of Imperial Defence. He closed with a request that MacDonald come to Cloan and talk it all over; until then he could not give a simple answer.

The Cloan talks took place accordingly, and MacDonald accepted Haldane's terms. He was to be Lord Chancellor, with Lord Cave, the outgoing Chancellor, continuing to preside over legal business in the Lords and the Privy Council so as to leave Haldane free to carry out his reform of the department and to assume the duties of Chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

It is clear, both from this account and from Beatrice Webb's, that Haldane had some voice in the formation of the Cabinet. At least an inkling of this was had at the time by people who were not close to the top leadership, and were far from pleased to find such influence in the hands of one who had been a Liberal Imperialist, who had only broken with Liberalism in January 1922, and whose first active campaign for Labour had been the election just past.[16] (At that they could not know that Haldane had written to Baldwin, immediately after the election, saying, "The King's Government has to be carried on, and I think that you are the only man who has a chance of doing this successfully.")[17] More recent and detached analysts, such as Mr. R. T. McKenzie, have suggested that Haldane was a strange choice as confidante to MacDonald.[18] Yet while Webb

was left for two weeks to consider what he would do in an office he was never to hold, and Snowden was left with no more than Henderson's verbal assurance that he would be Chancellor of the Exchequer,[19] Haldane was consulted at several stages, and allowed almost complete freedom to appoint himself. MacDonald was in a position, however, in which Haldane's experience, even his propensity for uttering wise and ponderous platitudes, must have seemed like invaluable rocks of certainty amid shifting sands. Nor was it unreasonable to have consulted this man who, surely alone among Labour politicians, was concerned about the Committee of Imperial Defence under a Labour Government. But had the movement known what was going on, MacDonald's task would have been even more difficult.

If statesmanship required that Haldane be consulted, politics should have moved MacDonald to rely on Arthur Henderson, the Secretary of the party. Yet a notorious misunderstanding developed over Henderson's own position. Apparently, MacDonald sent two suggested lists of offices to Henderson from Lossiemouth. On one, Henderson was omitted entirely, on the ground that he would devote himself to party organization and liaison between party and Cabinet. On the other, he was to be Chairman of Ways and Means. The latter suggestion angered Henderson, and he was not appeased when, on MacDonald's return to London, he was offered the War Office. He held out for the Home Office instead, and got it.[20] The whole incident suggests some insensitivity on MacDonald's part, as well as a dangerous lack of touch between leading figures in the movement. It seems likely that MacDonald had in mind a short term of office, in which it would be desirable to have Henderson devoting himself as much as possible to preparing the machinery for the next election.[21] It is also possible that MacDonald tended to underrate Henderson's general ability and to consider him primarily as a good political organizer.[22]

Clearly, MacDonald's job was very difficult. The fact that the party had never held office before made a host of Labourites feel that they were absolutely essential to the success of the venture. Colonel Wedgwood, offered the Financial Secretary-

ship to the War Office, insisted that a Vice-president of the Parliamentary Labour Party should have Cabinet rank; he ended as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—in the Cabinet.[23] George Lansbury was first asked by Henderson if he would serve in the Cabinet, then three days later offered the Ministry of Transport outside the Cabinet; he refused.[24] As it was, MacDonald had to abandon his hopes for a Cabinet of fourteen and raise the figure to twenty, "various important persons having refused to take office, *unless in Cabinet*".[25] Nor did the press help; Wedgwood's resolution may have been stiffened by the reports that he would be at the Admiralty, the India Office, or the Colonies.[26]

For some offices, Labour was especially poorly provided with candidates. The outstanding case was the appointment of a Scottish Judge Advocate. The party had all it could do to find men for the three top English law offices; Sir Henry Slesser, the new Solicitor General, besides not being an M.P. had hastily to be made K.C. on 14 January 1924.[27] For the Scottish post there was no one, unless Rosslyn Mitchell, defeated candidate for Central Glasgow, and only a solicitor, could be appointed. The Lord President of the Court of Session, Lord Clyde, informed MacDonald that this was impossible. The office went unfilled for days. MacDonald had to drop everything and make a special trip to Edinburgh to straighten the matter out. When H. P. Macmillan (later Lord Macmillan), a prominent Conservative barrister, was named on a special non-political basis, without a seat in the Cabinet, a great howl went up from the Clyde brigade; Maxton characteristically swore, "If he continued to have health and strength he would smash the Scottish Faculty of Advocates".[28]

Similar difficulties arose in connexion with the armed services. The solutions reached there were a picture in microcosm of the over-all solution which MacDonald pieced together. As Secretary for Air he named a distinguished post-war convert to Labour, Brigadier-General C. B. Thomson. At the War Office there was Stephen Walsh, trade unionist of the old school, a favourite of news photographers for his tiny stature and plain appearance, particularly in Court Dress. The Admiralty

provided a mysterious and controversial appointment—Lord Chelmsford, ex-Viceroy of India and a lifelong Conservative. Among the Under-Secretaries were Clement Attlee at the War Office and William Leach, an ILP "pacifist", for Air.

The Ministry as a whole was just such a mixture. Tories, and some Labourites, thought they saw a tendency to favour the "intellectuals" at the expense of the trade unionists. And it is true that only seven of the twenty Cabinet members were trade union men. Inevitably, MacDonald had to look beyond the unions for his Ministers; as it was, Haldane and Henderson were the only ones with Cabinet experience. Clynes had served for a time as Food Controller during the war. A few Ministers had been Parliamentary Private Secretaries: Walsh, Trevelyan, Lord Arnold. The Prime Minister had, of course, no experience of office at all.[29]

Snowden claims resentment was aroused in the unions;[30] their journals give little evidence of it. It was rather when they felt that one of their own men was behaving snobbishly—J. H. Thomas and Frank Hodges, Civil Lord of the Admiralty and former Miners' Federation Secretary, were the leading examples —that the unions became annoyed.* When MacDonald did try to appoint trade union leaders he was not always successful; Robert Smillie, among the most respected, refused office.[31] Trade unionists were already beginning to realize, as their acceptance without serious demurral of the personnel of this first Labour Government shows, that a political career was a full-time job, not an occasional sideline for union leaders.

Opponents also tried to prove that the Cabinet was riddled with non working-class elements—it "has no claim to call itself Labour", wrote C. F. G. Masterman, M.P.[32] Of the twenty members, eleven at most could claim proletarian origins, as could fourteen of the twenty-four Junior Ministers.[33] Here again, protests were relatively few. Aside from the Scottish Judge Advocate, the biggest stir came over Lord Chelmsford; this stemmed from his Conservative-Imperialist record, however, rather than his social origins. In appointing him, Mac-

*Thomas loved formal banquets; Hodges played golf with the Duke of York (later King George VI).

Donald probably went too far in his search for men of respectability and authority. Attlee says that MacDonald thought Chelmsford "would be able to deal with admirals"; others, that he was brought in for the sake of his knowledge of India.[34] But Sidney Olivier went to the India Office (as Lord Olivier), and we are told that Chelmsford confined himself, in Cabinet, to his own sphere at the Admiralty[35]—though he occasionally spoke on India in the Lords.

Most observers, including severe critics of MacDonald, have agreed that the Cabinet of 1924 was about as good as any that could have been formed by Labour at the time.[36] The trade unions were represented about as well as the available personnel allowed. Every important element of Labour Party opinion was represented, if not always in proportion to its strength. The Left had John Wheatley, at the crucial Ministry of Health, as well as that gentle enemy of Cabinet Government, Fred Jowett of Bradford, as Minister of Works. No one ever thought of denying that the ex-Liberals were well represented, with Haldane, Wedgwood, Charles Trevelyan at the Board of Education, and Noel Buxton as Minister of Agriculture. If there were, as some alleged too many of these last and of the members of the Union of Democratic Control,* it can be said in MacDonald's defence that he was selecting from the more able and articulate members of his party, and from those whose capacity for work he himself knew best.

The appointment most frequently greeted with sighs of relief was the Prime Minister's own assumption of the burdens of the Foreign Secretaryship. It had been rumoured that J. H. Thomas was being pushed by the trade unions for this post; the ILP begged MacDonald to save the world from such a fate, and he did. The only doubters were perhaps a few UDCers who mourned the exclusion of that uncompromising crusader for open diplomacy and fairness to colonial peoples, E. D. Morel, and such far-sighted observers as King George V, who feared lest the Prime Minister be overtaxing his strength.[37]

*Lucy Masterman, *C.F.G. Masterman* (London, 1939), p. 339. Nine UDC members were in the Cabinet; see H.M. Swanwick, *Builders of Peace* (London, 1924), pp. 166–7.

The advent of the MacDonald Ministry, despite its considerable dilution with elements of the traditional ruling classes, was seen as a revolutionary change in the personnel of Government. Among working people there was "a naïve and rapturous pride" in the fact that men of their class occupied the top posts of Empire. Many would gloat, with David Kirkwood: "Kings and potentates petition Ramsay MacDonald. Park Lane can no longer get cushy jobs for its sons in the Colonies. Bishops, financiers, lawyers, and all the polite spongers upon the working classes know that this is the beginning of the end."[38]

The newspapers revelled in the opportunity. James Brown, an old miners' M.P., was named to deputize for the King as Lord High Commissioner to the Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the first commoner to do so since 1643. Journalists followed Mr. Brown through his brief spell of glory, which included temporary residence in Holyrood House. It was maintained "that the strongest barriers in the social structure of Great Britain have been smashed".[39] Some of the stories were patronizing: Stephen Walsh was reported to be "entirely unable to conceal his reverence for generals"; to their remonstrances, he is supposed to have replied, " 'I know my place. You have commanded Armies in the field when I was nothing but a private in the ranks'."[40] Other tales were raucous: J. H. Thomas was said to have introduced himself to the heads of departments at the Colonial Office with the statement, "I'm here to see that there is no mucking about with the British Empire."[41] The increased interest in Labour was reflected in the *Daily Herald*'s rise in circulation from 290,000 on 25 August 1923, to 412,000 on 1 February 1924.[42]

On the crest of all this excitement, MacDonald charted the new Government's goal modestly: "We hope to continue only so long in office, but certainly so long in office, as will enable us to do some good work that will remove many obstacles which would have hampered future Governments if they faced the problems that we have now to face."[43]

One of the problems the new Prime Minister faced was peculiar to the Labour Government of 1924, however. It arose in the form of a storm of disapproval within the movement, the

moment it became apparent that the new Ministers were, for the most part, going to follow established practices regarding ceremonial occasions and the wearing of Court Dress. The controversy lasted as long as the Government. An ILP propagandist was heckled at a crowded meeting of shipyard workers by a voice crying, "A workers' Government, ye ca' it! It's a bloody lum hat Government like a' the rest!" Some saw in this "medieval circus" a threat of "dry rot" setting into the party. As late as October, the month in which the Government fell, the editor of the *Daily Herald* was maintaining that the Court Dress affair showed that the Government had failed to realize the importance of a "foundation of social equality", without which no amount of political or economic reforms would make any real difference.[44]

On the other hand, Labourites were reminded of Lenin's alleged telegram to his Berlin Ambassador: "Put on a petticoat if it will help to get peace".[45] And MacDonald counter-attacked with characteristic subtlety:

> I have known people who showed vanity by the clumsiness of their clothes. A tattered hat and a red tie, a tone of voice and religious repetition of Marxian phrases, may be as indicative of a man who has sold himself to appearances as the possession of a ceremonial dress to enable him to attend ceremonies which are historical parts of his duties.[46]

This tempest in a tea-pot seems very remote today. Perhaps Court Dress *was* the beginning of the end, for those who hoped that the Labour Party represented the British Revolution in embryo. To the fellow whom Beatrice Webb liked to call "the average sensual man", disillusionment was probably minimal; the *Annual Register* noted that those Labour Members holding posts in the King's Household were returned to Parliament that autumn with increased majorities.[47]

NOTES

[1] *The Times*, 24 Dec. 1923.

[2] Quoted in Sir Frederick Maurice, *Life of Viscount Haldane*, Vol. II, *Haldane, 1915–28* (London, 1939), p. 151. The meeting was of

the existing Front Bench, not the future Cabinet; see *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1912–24*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1952), pp. 261–2 (15 Jan. 1924).

[3]169 H. C. Deb., 5 s., 426 (18 Jan. 1924).

[4]ibid., 609 (21 Jan. 1924).

[5]ibid., 310–11 (17 Jan. 1924).

[6]P. C. Hoffman in the *Shop Assistant*, 26 Jan. 1924, p. 64.

[7]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 643, 641, 344–8, and 642.

[8]Quoted in Sir Harold Nicolson, *King George V* (London, 1952), p. 384.

[9]Philip Snowden, *Autobiography* (London, 1934), II, 596–8.

[10]See R. T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties* (London, 1955), esp. p. 309.

[11]M. McCarran, *Fabianism in the Political Life of Britain, 1919–31* (Washington, 1952), p. 323.

[12]See Eric Estorick, *Stafford Cripps* (London, 1949), pp. 70–71, and Lord Parmoor, *A Retrospect* (London, 1936), pp. 189–90.

[13]Quoted in *B. Webb's Diaries, 1912–24*, p. 259.

[14]ibid., pp. 261–3 (15 and 18 Jan. 1924).

[15]Letter to his mother; for this and what follows, see Maurice, *Haldane*, II, 137–47.

[16]See David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt* (London, 1935), p. 221, and *Forward*, 9 Feb. 1924.

[17]Quoted in A. Baldwin, *My Father, the True Story* (London, 1956), p. 126.

[18]McKenzie, *British Political Parties*, p. 309, n. 1.

[19]Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 599.

[20]See Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 596-600, and M. A. Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson* (London, 1938), p. 236.

[21]J. S. Middleton, interviewed by the author, 29 Dec. 1951.

[22]A. Fenner Brockway, M.P., interviewed by the author, 15 May 1952.

[23]C. V. Wedgwood, *Last of the Radicals* (London, 1951), pp. 152–3.

[24]Raymond Postgate, *Life of George Lansbury* (London, 1951), p. 225.

[25]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1912–24*, p. 263 (18 Jan. 1924); italics hers.

[26]Clippings from ten major newspapers, kept by Mrs. Wedgwood and kindly made available to the author through Miss C. V. Wedgwood.

[27]Sir Henry Slesser, *Judgment Reserved* (London, 1941), pp. 93–94.

[28]See Macmillan, *A Man of Law's Tale* (London, 1952), pp. 81–84; *The Times*, 31 Jan., 9 and 11 Feb. 1924; *Forward*, 9 Feb. 1924.

[29]See the *Labour Magazine*, Feb. 1924, pp. 436–7.

[30]Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 606–7.

[31]Smillie, *My Life for Labour* (London, 1924), p. 303.

[32]*Nation*, 2 Feb. 1924, p. 627.
[33]Based on biographical sketches in *The Times*, 23–25 and 29 Jan. 1924.
[34]Clement Attlee, *As It Happened* (London, 1954), p. 96; Nourah Waterhouse, *Private and Official* (London, 1942), pp. 311–13, and J. S. Middleton, interview, 29 Dec. 1951.
[35]Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 609.
[36]See ibid.; also, *Fortnightly Review*, March 1924, p. 341.
[37]Nicolson, *King George V*, p. 385.
[38]Egon Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party*, 2nd ed. (London, 1930), preface, p. xii; Kirkwood in the AEU *Journal*, March 1924.
[39]Sir P. Gibbs, in *The World's Work*, Apr. 1924, pp. 619–25.
[40]ibid.
[41]Lord Haldane, quoted in Maurice, *Haldane*, II, 152.
[42]TUC *Report, 1924*, p. 266.
[43]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1103 (14 Feb. 1924).
[44]John Paton, *Left Turn!* (London, 1936), p. 168; Thomas Johnston in *Forward*, 22 March 1924; Hamilton Fyfe in the *Socialist Review*, Oct. 1924, pp. 109–16.
[45]*Socialist Review*, Apr. 1924, pp. 153–4.
[46]Interview in the *New Leader*, 18 Apr. 1924, p. 9.
[47]*Annual Register, 1924*, p. 119.

VIII

HOUSING

Mr. Wheatley Makes His Mark

"The housing scheme is our most important legislative item. It is really the biggest piece of constructive industrial organization which has probably ever been attempted."

J. Ramsay MacDonald[1]

In the Debate on the Censure of Baldwin's Government, Ramsay MacDonald cited housing and unemployment as the two principal domestic issues facing the new Parliament. Both problems had taken on a new seriousness as a result of the war; both were matters in which a Labour Government, especially, would have to achieve some substantial successes, if its record were not to be a grave disappointment to its supporters.

The housing shortage developed out of the disruption of the building trade, and the suspension of its activities, during the war. Various efforts had been made since 1918 to deal with this problem, notably those of Dr. Christopher Addison (later Lord Addison), the first Minister of Health, in the early years of the Lloyd George Coalition. The Addison schemes had done more to inflate the cost of building than to increase the number of houses,[2] and in June 1921, they fell victim to the Geddes Axe.

Neville Chamberlain, Minister of Health under Baldwin, began afresh in 1923. The core of his plan was an annual subsidy of £6, for a twenty-year period, for the construction of houses meeting certain specifications as to size.[3] These were to be built by private enterprise wherever possible; they could be undertaken by Local Authorities if the latter could "satisfy the Ministry that the need for houses can more appropriately be met in this way". The Act did not attack the problems of labour and material shortages directly, the theory being that the more the Government interfered in the actual workings of the industry, the more its recovery was hampered.

The Chamberlain scheme, and the extension of Rent Restrictions that accompanied it, were intended to be temporary expedients; their terminal dates were 1 October 1925 and 24 June 1925 respectively. The vast majority of the Chamberlain houses were built for sale. This suited the Conservatives, who felt that home ownership was in itself a most desirable social institution, but Liberal and Labour critics argued that the crying need was for houses for rent to working class tenants. This the Chamberlain scheme, despite the substantial construction which it stimulated, did not meet.

When the Labour Government was formed, it was a strong Ministerial team that took up the housing challenge. John Wheatley, the portly publisher of religious calendars, and the one Clydesider in the Cabinet, was Minister of Health. He was a complex individual, whose cherubic countenance, courteous manner and lucidity of expression were mingled with a biting wit and violently Left opinions, as well as undeniable business competence and a strong streak of practicality. By 1929, Wheatley had drifted with the ILP into a constant and futile antagonism towards the Labour Party's leadership and behaviour; he died a back-bench critic of the second Labour Government, in 1930. But in 1924 he had a brief chance for positive achievement, and made the most of it. His able lieutenant was Arthur Greenwood, the Parliamentary Secretary, a promising young man who had made his reputation with the TUC-Labour Party Joint Research and Information Department. It is said that MacDonald's first idea was to make Greenwood the Minister and Wheatley the Secretary;[4] their talents and positions in the party complemented each other better in the reversal of roles which Wheatley insisted upon and got.

The two lost no time in getting to work. On 6 February, together with Tom Shaw, the Minister of Labour, they met with representatives of the building trades. This led to the creation of a Committee, consisting of nineteen members (including the Chairman) representing the employers in the industry, and fifteen (including the Vice-chairman) the employees. The Ministry of Labour provided a secretary; otherwise the Government was unrepresented. The Committee's terms of reference

were comprehensive: to "report on the present position in the building industry, with regard to the carrying out of a full housing programme, having particular reference to the means of providing an adequate supply of labour and materials".[5]

While the Committee pondered its assignment, the three parties in the House of Commons established the general positions from which they were to argue the question in the ensuing months. Each had its special reasons for uneasiness. The Labourites, suddenly responsible for dealing with the problem, and uncertain as to what the Government's policy would be, may also have been somewhat disconcerted by Wheatley's move in setting up a committee of experts, more than half of them representing business interests. Some Labour Members continued to talk as they had in Opposition: "We Scots," cried David Kirkwood, "have made up our minds, as far as it is humanly possible, to make it impossible for private individuals to own the homes of the people." For the most part, however, the P.L.P. sat silent, listening to Wheatley as he defended himself, for all the world like his Conservative predecessors, against the charge of permitting overcrowding in newly approved housing developments by local authorities.[6]

The Conservatives, though quite ready to taunt the Minister with statements, dredged up from Labour's past, about building guilds or compulsory construction of council houses for letting at rents adjusted to the tenants' incomes, were somewhat embarrassed by the fact that the Chamberlain Act was still in operation, pending the introduction of a new scheme. Unlike the Liberals, they could not very well criticize the Minister for "overcrowding" that was permissible by the terms of that Act. Again, while some Tories held to the old filtering-down theory of attacking the shortage—new houses for the well-to-do are all right because they mean the freeing of other houses for the less wealthy, thus easing the pinch all round—others realized, as the limitations on the size of houses in Chamberlain's Act showed, that the Government had consciously to aim its programme towards the construction of homes for working-class families, at least pending a full revival of the industry.

The Liberals, whose support the Government's proposals

would have to obtain, were divided on this issue as on most others. Late in 1923, studies of housing were published by two prominent Liberals, Major Harry Barnes and E. D. Simon (later Lord Simon of Wythenshawe).[7] Barnes concluded that private enterprise could not do the job, since the people in need could not pay an economic rent; Simon thought the private builder could still do it, if taxation on houses were drastically cut, special protection were given against unemployment hardships, and "rings" were prevented from holding up the price of materials. At least it can be said that neither writer was satisfied with things as they were. But Liberal responses to specific proposals were unpredictable, and likely to prove diverse. Add to this the natural Liberal desire to find flaws in Labour's performance, and it becomes clear that John Wheatley's work would have to be skilful to succeed.

On 10 April the industry's report appeared. It consisted of four reports of sub-committees: on General Purposes, Labour, Materials, and Scottish problems. The Committee had held meetings with representatives of the building materials industries, as an aid in reaching its conclusions. The report was a concise analysis of the problem, short enough and clear enough for the perusal of busy M.P.s. The disastrous decline in the house-building labour force was analysed, with figures. There were shortages of bricklayers, masons, and plasterers, which would, it was predicted, extend to carpenters and plumbers as soon as industries such as shipbuilding which used these skills had revived from their depressed condition. The causes of the labour shortage were the casual nature of employment, due to seasonal shifts and irregularities of demand; drafts on the available labour force by other industries; the prolonged building depression of 1905–14; the upheavals of war, post-war disturbances, and emigration. Since the first of these causes was most susceptible to treatment, it was here that the major attack should come; the report recommended a fifteen-year programme, to give needed stability to the industry. Meanwhile, the report advised spreading contracts for housing construction as widely as possible, designing them to suit the smaller employer; this, said the Committee, was the best way to make use

of the existing labour force. This force was to be expanded by raising the maximum age limit for taking apprentices into the trade from sixteen to twenty, by shortening the apprenticeship period to four years (from five), and by a certain amount of upgrading of unskilled building labour. The last point, vaguely phrased in the report, was much criticized for its lack of specific figures.

The remaining major proposals of the Committee were for a survey of housing proposals and of the state of labour and materials across the country, and the creation of a Statutory Committee, to be composed of experts from within the industry, and given broad powers to help in the course of the programme. Nothing ever came of these recommendations. Perhaps the memory of the expensive Addison surveys was too green. The Statutory Committee drew immediate fire from C. F. G. Masterman, who led the Liberals in housing debates. He attacked it as a Government-sponsored trust or super-monopoly, and Sir Kingsley Wood and Lord Eustace Percy echoed his argument on behalf of the Tories.[8] But the core of the report lay in the recommendations for the solution of the labour shortage, the advocacy of a long-term programme, and the general advice to the Government not to intervene directly itself. The report did not estimate the number of additional skilled labourers which the Committee expected to be able to recruit by means of its programme for dilution; instead, it set forth the number of houses which could be built, year by year, in the course of a fifteen-year programme. All this the Government accepted.

Wheatley's design, then, was to mobilize the industry, offer the Government's support, and do everything possible to give confidence to the trade, employers and employees alike, even to the point of letting it draw up its own plan, with a minimum of Government interference. It was a brilliant piece of improvisation, the construction of an alliance among the interested parties. Wheatley followed up the publication of the report with a series of meetings with representatives of the local government authorities, for purposes of ironing out the terms of the proposed legislation. Then he was able to come to the House of Commons with a scheme based, as he proudly said, on the ideas

of the industry and the administering authorities. No one could deride it as a doctrinaire Labour blueprint. It was presented to the Commons as an accomplished fact, and if it was not exactly socialism, it was certainly statesmanship.

It was not until 3 June that the Finance Resolution for the Housing Bill was introduced, in a speech of solid moderation, by the Minister. Here, as throughout the arduous business of getting his scheme enacted, Wheatley gave the House an example of Ministerial leadership far removed from the normal flamboyance of the Clyde. The details of the scheme were set forth in a Memorandum.[9] There was to be a new subsidy of £9 per year for thirty years (£12 10*s* in agricultural parishes), to be paid for houses meeting certain specifications: they must be rented to tenants who would live in them; there must be no subletting without the consent of the Local Authority; the houses were not to be sold except with the permission of the Minister of Health (or the Scottish Board); there must be a fair wages clause in the construction contract; and the rents must be based on those of pre-war working-class houses in the same area—i.e. not on the rents for similar houses, but on those for houses occupied by a similar class of tenant, which would mean in practice a gain for the tenants of the new houses. If the construction proved too costly to be met by the prescribed rent, plus the Exchequer subsidy, plus a subsidy from the Local Authority equal to half the Exchequer subsidy, then the rents could be raised.

Besides these conditions of eligibility for the subsidy, the programme as a whole was to be reviewed every three years. If at such a time, production over the preceding three years were found to be less than two-thirds of the total predicted by the Building Trade Committee, the programme could then be terminated. It could also be terminated in the event of the "cost being found after full inquiry at any time to be unreasonable", due regard being had for whether or not the rise in costs were due to factors outside the control of either the building trade or the building materials industry.

Finally, the Memorandum offered some figures on the anticipated cost of the programme. It began at £278,000 from the

Exchequer and £135,000 from Local Authorities in 1924–5, mounted to £23,156,000 and £11,250,000 per year from 1940–1 to 1963–4, and declined to a final payment of £645,000 and £314,000 in 1979–80. For this expenditure, the nation was to get 2,500,000 houses: 90,000 in 1925, then a larger number each year until hitting a peak production of 225,000 per year from 1934 through 1939, when the programme stopped.

What this great scheme did was to set up a system of Government aid in the construction of working-class houses, aid with several important conditions attached. Some of these conditions related to the individual houses—their construction, costs, the terms on which they were to be rented—and some to the production of houses generally. The method of controlling production and costs was not to attempt to have the Government manage the construction programme directly, but to strike a bargain with the industry, and leave it up to the interested parties on the spot to manage ways and means of living up to that bargain.

The one exception to this policy of autonomy rather than control was embodied in the Building Materials (Charges and Supply) Bill, introduced on 5 June 1924 which would have allowed the Board of Trade to investigate, at the request of the Minister of Health, any prices or restrictions of supply in building materials suspected of being "unreasonable"; if the suspicions proved correct, the Board could then fix prices and break restrictions aimed at the raising of prices. The Minister of Health was also to have strong powers to commandeer building materials and to take over plants producing them, if he, in consultation with the Board of Trade, found production "unreasonably prevented, withheld, or restricted". Even the promise of compensation, contained in the Bill, would probably have been insufficient to win Liberal support for it. Such broad powers, to be left in the hands of Labourite Ministers, would surely have been attacked as the thin edge of the socialist wedge, even though Wheatley did claim to have the agreement of the brick manufacturers to the contents of his proposal.[10] Still, it is possible that Wheatley could have got some part of this Bill enacted by appealing to Liberal dislike of combinations in

restraint of trade, and perhaps accepting some additional safeguards against misuse of the powers of expropriation. The measure was to come up for its Second Reading in the autumn; the Government fell before it could be put to this test.

The Housing Bill itself had a long road to travel before becoming law. The Conservatives opposed it, at least formally, all along the line: the scheme would be too expensive; it was folly to promise a fifteen-year programme, and disingenuous as well, in the light of the provision for triennial review; the provisions for increasing the supply of labour were inadequate; rising costs in building materials might swamp the programme. To all such points there were reasonably effective replies, and Wheatley and Greenwood usually made the most of them. Generally the Tory attack lacked vigour, cohesiveness, and determination. Often it was left to minor stars in the Tory firmament, and they sometimes performed feebly.[11] Delivering the main Tory speech on the Second Reading, Lord Eustace Percy startled the House by urging the Government to set up:

> . . . a central administration . . . with wide discretion in the administration of funds placed at its disposal by the Government, and able, without interference or competition with the labour supply at the disposal of private enterprise, to enlist a special staff of labourers as public servants in the carrying out of a public programme, and for such a scheme I would not have a fifteen years' programme, but a thirty years' programme or longer.[12]

Perhaps "this brilliant effort of municipal socialism", as Masterman scornfully called it,[13] can be taken as evidence that the Conservatives did not expect to advance their fortunes very far by opposing Wheatley's Bill. By his agreement with the building trade he had genuinely impressed some Tories; one Backbencher hailed it as "the beginning of a new spirit in industry".[14] The similarity in approach between the Wheatley scheme and the Chamberlain Act also made all-out opposition difficult for the Tories, many of whom would doubtless have liked to attack the whole principle of state subsidies had it not involved disowning their own legislative record. On the Third Reading, only 128 Tories bothered to enter the "Nay" lobby.

The Liberals, under no compunction to spare the Chamberlain scheme, can be found denouncing the subsidy as "a thoroughly vicious form of dole . . . demoralizing to those who receive it."[15] But they were much more inhibited than the Tories from actually voting against the bill. In some cases this may have stemmed from a disinclination to be held responsible for defeating it; in others, there was a sincere desire to give the Wheatley plan a trial, at least. And above all, there was always the necessity either of preserving the Government from major defeat or of being ready to go to the country against it. Thus the Ministry had little reason to fear outright rejection of the Housing Bill, although it faced a few attempts at whittling it down by amendment, and many efforts to enlarge it still further.

Among the few were efforts to alter the complicated clause governing rents for the new houses. Neville Chamberlain criticized these provisions on the grounds that, whereas in his Act any burden resulting from unexpectedly high costs of construction was placed upon the Local Authority, in the new programme it was to fall on the tenant, through an increase in his rent.[16] A concerted effort to change the clause came with E. D. Simon's proposed Amendment to equate the rents of the new houses to those of existing houses in the same area and "of similar size, type, and amenity".[17] This was supported by other Liberals, partly on grounds of justice—why should the new tenants be subsidized while the other tenants in the area were not?—and partly because of the complexity of the clause as it stood. This was bound to cast some suspicion upon Liberal motives, for the Amendment could only have resulted either in lowering the standards of new construction to keep the rents down, or in raising the rents out of reach of the poorer people most in need of housing aid. The fate of the proposed Amendment was interesting and typical. After being moved and vocally supported by Liberals, and attacked passionately by the Minister, as striking at the heart of his Bill, it was finally deserted by its proposers, who joined the Government to defeat it by a vote of 216 to 116. The votes for this Liberal Amendment were largely Tory in the end. Sequences of this sort were already

familiar to the House; the Tories poured scorn on the Liberals for lacking the courage of their convictions, and only occasionally was Wheatley really forced to give in.

Among the attempts to enlarge the Bill, two in particular taxed Wheatley's Parliamentary skill. First of these was the persistent attempt to increase the permitted size of the houses eligible for subsidy. Wheatley had been in the forefront of the drive to amend Chamberlain's scheme in this same direction, and had been partially successful on that occasion. In 1923, there could be only two attitudes on this question: either, with Mr. Chamberlain, you advocated the construction of "rabbit hutches", or, with Labour, you pressed for decent housing. But in 1924 Labourites began to find it less simple. Some Members, Wheatley and Chamberlain among them, wanted the size kept as it was in order to prevent the new houses from seeping away to the middle class instead of serving the working classes as intended. Others clung to the view that the permitted size was too small, and would produce the slums of the future. Still others supported proposals to increase the size of houses in order to embarrass the Government, or to produce just what Wheatley feared—subsidized homes for the middle class. Clearly, not all who supported the existing size limits were, *ipso facto*, enemies of the working class in general and the tenants in particular, as Labour had been inclined to assume before 1924. Equally clearly, there were various motives, not all creditable, among those who pressed for more liberal standards. In the event, Liberal amendments to increase the permitted size were ruled out of order, as requiring additional expenditure, and hence a new Money Resolution.[18] This Wheatley refused to introduce, and debate on the issue was effectively cut off.

The Liberals' other main line of attack concerned the definition of the "agricultural parishes" which were to be eligible for an extra subsidy. The Bill set up two criteria: population (not over 35 per 100 acres), and the proportion of the value of agricultural land to the total land value of the parish (at least 33.3 per cent). Houses built in such parishes, and meeting the general conditions of the Bill, would receive the larger subsidy.[19] The Liberals, led by a persistent and adroit

wielder of the Parliamentary Question, Ernest Brown, exploited to the full the difficulties presented by this definition. They suggested all sorts of ways in which the population of an indisputably bucolic parish might exceed the permitted density: the presence of any such institution as an orphanage, a lunatic asylum, an RAF station would have this effect, and might well distort the delicate ratio of land values, too. Would the Minister not consider liberalizing the terms of his definition? He would, and the maximum permitted population was raised to 50 per acre, the minimum percentage of agricultural land lowered to 25 per cent. The Tories, at first inclined to join in the fun, drew back in alarm at the extent of the Government's concessions, and the debate petered out.[20]

Other changes pressed on the Minister by Liberals and Tories were less important. Amendments were passed to safeguard the interests of town-planning, to limit the number of houses per acre, and to require the use of any proven new methods of construction that might be developed. Beyond these, no significant alterrations took place. Trevelyan Thomson, a Liberal, tried to amend the Bill to prohibit the demolition of dwellings and stop other building operations which would interfere with the construction of dwellings, but both proposals were ruled out of order. The same fate befell Oswald Mosley's amendment to compel owners to let vacant houses as dwellings. Of the Lords' Amendments, the only important one, cutting the time between reviews of progress under the programme from three years to two, was accepted.

So the most important of the Labour Government's domestic achievements finally reached the statute book, receiving the Royal assent on 7 August 1924. It was a personal triumph for John Wheatley. Praise was showered on him; Masterman had already written in the *Nation*:

> The House has found a new favourite in Mr. Wheatley. . . . He has been the one conspicuous success in the new Parliament. A short, squat, middle-aged man, with a chubby face beaming behind large spectacles, he trots about like a benign Pickwick, or a sympathetic country solicitor to whom the most reticent would be glad to con-

> fide the darkest secret. But he possesses a perfect Parliamentary manner; a pleasant voice, confidence without arrogance, a quick power of repartee, a capacity of convincing statement, and above all the saving grace of humour.[21]

Perhaps partly because of Wheatley's reputation with the Left, and partly because his scheme was a suitably ambitious one, the Government was considerably less embarrassed by its own supporters during the progress of this Bill than was usually the case. Only once did a Labour Member make a speech striking at the base of the Bill. Keir Hardie's brother, George, clung to the old Single Tax doctrine, deploring the lack of attention to "land and rating [which] today form the one real obstacle to the production of houses at economic rents". He longed for a "Bill that would wipe out once and for all the anomalies of this system of blood-sucking of the life of the nation by the landlords".[22] In the context of Wheatley's scheme, the speech had an archaic ring.

The Wheatley Housing Act went on to do good work under the Tory Administration that resumed power in November 1924. E. D. Simon, a stern critic of the Bill during its passage, later gave it credit for the expansion of the trade which resulted in the steady progress from 86,210 houses built in 1923–4 to 238,914 in 1927–8.[23] The special subsidy for agricultural labourers' cottages was less successful; by 31 March 1928, just 10,195 such houses had been completed. It is also true that the rents for Wheatley houses far exceeded the target of nine shillings a week announced by MacDonald in February 1924. Simon estimates the early rents at about fifteen shillings, and only when the depression struck did nine shillings become a possibility. This was due to miscalculation of rentals in relation to costs, for the average cost per house never much exceeded MacDonald's estimate of £500.[24]

Perhaps it was ironic that the Wheatley scheme actually resulted in substantial relief of the housing shortage by the workings of that very theory of "filtering down" so scorned by its proponents. The pressure for accommodations was lessened, even though the people most in need probably had to settle for

the houses vacated by the new tenants of Wheatley houses. But had the Wheatley scheme been continued in full force into the depression years, instead of being cut off by the Conservative Government after 1927, it is entirely probable that it would have produced its 2½ million homes, and that the majority of them could have been rented at the predicted nine shillings.

The Labour Government's achievement in housing showed what could result from energetic and intelligent development of policy, largely free from the shackles of a doctrinaire approach. The programme that evolved under Wheatley was not to any significant degree foreshadowed by Labour's attitudes before 1924; what it did owe to its Labour parentage was its freedom from the limitations imposed by fear of a big, ambitious programme. Through the lucky circumstance that it could be paid for by future generations rather than the taxpayer of 1924, it was also free from that fatal barrier to so much that the Labour Government might have done, Philip Snowden's financial caution.

The Government's experience with the question of rent restriction and evictions provided a striking contrast with its success in housing—the more so since the two subjects were related, and both involved the Ministry of Health.

Evictions were a serious matter, although their incidence was far from evenly spread over the Kingdom, and reports of them often exaggerated. Figures reported to Parliament showed that 35,001 actions for possession had been entered in the courts in England and Wales between the passage on 1 August 1923 of the Chamberlain Rent Restriction Act, and 31 March 1924. These resulted in 21,326 orders for possession, and 3,835 actual warrants. Another report, unfortunately not covering the same period, showed that in Glasgow and Clydebank, the worst centres of the eviction plague, 24,116 cases had been brought to court since 1 January 1923; 4,936 eviction orders had been granted, and 1,009 carried out. The Scottish Secretary, William Adamson, pointed out that the comparatively small numbers of orders actually carried out was deceptive, since many tenants moved out as soon as an action was entered against them, with-

out awaiting formal judgment. Also, whether or not the action was successful, the strain of the proceedings was very great, and the feeling of insecurity given to all unemployed tenants very serious.[25]

On 22 February 1924 Benjamin Gardner, a Labour Member, introduced a Private Member's Bill to replace Neville Chamberlain's Rent Restriction Act of 1923. He boasted that this was "as openly a tenants' Bill as the last Bill—which became an Act —was a landlords' Bill".[26] It would have narrowed the grounds for granting eviction to one: the desire of the owner to occupy the house himself. Even then, he was to provide alternative accommodation for the distressed tenant. The Bill would also have cut the permitted rent increase over pre-war levels from 40 per cent (including repairs allowance) down to 25 per cent; it would have brought back under control all housing decontrolled after 1920; it would have abolished the system of tied cottages; finally, it would have plugged a gap, arising from court decisions, whereby the preceding Act was held to have provided for rent increases to cover increases in local rates, but not for decreases in the event that rates went down.

This ambitious potpourri was supported by Labour speeches stressing tenant miseries, such as houses with such thin walls that one nail hung two pictures belonging to different tenants. But the Tories, led by the ex-Minister of Health, Neville Chamberlain, attacked the Bill as "ill-digested . . . simply a throwing together of anything which is thought would appeal to the tenants".[27] It would worsen the housing shortage by making the provision of houses unprofitable; the cost of living had risen 79 per cent while rents had been held to a 40 per cent increase; a 25 per cent limit would be grossly unfair. And to the Labour image of the grasping house factor, Tories opposed the image of the deserving widow with her life savings invested in a house or two for rent.

The Liberals, torn between belief in free enterprise and support for social welfare, made troubled speeches attacking the Government for hiding behind a Private Member's Bill on so important a matter instead of bringing in proposals of their own, but also criticizing the Conservatives for cold-heartedness

in the face of suffering, and ending with rather uneasy expressions of support for the Bill.[28]

For the Government, Wheatley delivered a strong but impolitic tirade, accusing the Tories of dishonesty in moving an amendment for an expert inquiry when they really objected to anything that would reduce rents. A Tory, he continued, "believes that the country should be ruled by experts; I believe it should be ruled by representatives of the people."[29] The whole performance was such as to increase non-Labour suspicions that the Government's purpose was merely to appear to favour a strong line while accepting a minimum of actual responsibility in the matter.

Upstairs in Committee the Gardner Bill languished, while charges and counter-charges of obstructing its progress flew at Question Time, and David Kirkwood called upon MacDonald to play Canute to the tide of evictions: "Would the Prime Minister make some announcement that would stop evictions now; not wait until a Bill or anything is passed, but now?"[30] Finally the Government despaired of the Gardner Bill, and brought in one of its own. It was a simple measure, comprising two main points. It empowered a court to refuse to grant eviction in cases of arrears in rent due to unemployment, provided such refusal did not, in the court's judgment, work greater hardship than granting the eviction would cause. Next, the landlord wishing to take possession for himself or his child was to be denied his petition if he failed to provide his tenant with alternative accommodation, again with the exception regarding hardship.[31]

Wheatley supported this measure with an appeal to all parties, stressing the damage to family life of evictions, and the basic necessity of a man's having some security regarding his family's home if he is to rehabilitate himself and get off the dole. In contrast to his speech in support of the Gardner Bill, he made every effort to antagonize no one. Neville Chamberlain, who followed, referred to the Minister's speech as "dove-like cooings", designed to conceal the weaknesses of the Bill.

Chief among these weaknesses, as soon became apparent, was Clause One. Why, asked Sir John Simon, single out, not merely

the landlord class, but one segment of that class, those landlords unlucky enough to have unemployed tenants, and require that they carry the burden of housing these people free of charge? Why not, asked Chamberlain for the Conservatives and Asquith for the Liberals, place the burden on the community as a whole, by forcing the Scottish Parish Councils to emulate the English Poor Law Guardians by including consideration of rent in allotting poor relief? To this the Government could find no answer, and at length Clynes arose to say that the Government would substitute for Clause One a new clause providing assistance to the unemployed in paying their rents, from public funds. The Speaker immediately ruled that such a clause would require a Money Resolution, and would probably have to be a separate Bill entirely. Members began to press Clynes for a definite statement: was the objectionable Clause One now officially dropped? The unhappy Minister squirmed, would not respond directly. Joynson-Hicks, Asquith, Austen Chamberlain, finally even Baldwin joined in the hunt. Clynes would only say, "The issue before the House is whether the House is favourable to providing means whereby the unemployed workman shall be sheltered in his home."[32] In the end, the Government was saved further humiliation only when that vociferous anti-socialist, W. M. R. Pringle, talked the debate out past the 8.15 closure.

But the drama, if it can be called that, was not over. At Adjournment on 4 April, Clynes, attempting to clarify the situation, merely added to the confusion as to the Government's next move. He could not say whether the Exchequer would be empowered to help the impoverished Scottish Parish Councils to help, in turn, the distressed tenants. At this, Kirkwood banished all restraint:

> The time has come for the Labour Party in office to prove . . . some use to the people who fear evictions. Up to the moment they may as well have had the Tories in power. . . . If the Government do not stop evictions, then I will. . . . I will defy the law, and if I am imprisoned I will be a greater menace than David Kirkwood on the Floor of the House. . . . I am not going to be a

party, even supposing it destroys all the Labour Governments that ever were in office, to seeing the children of the unemployed starve in order that the landlord's rent may be paid.[33]

On Sunday the 6th, it seemed that the Government was yielding to pressure. The Under-Secretary of Health for Scotland made a speech in Glasgow in which he said that a new clause would be introduced providing Exchequer support for the impoverished Local Authorities. But when the Government's Amendment to Clause One appeared on Monday, there was no trace of such a scheme. It simply provided that "no eviction order shall be issued until the tenant has had a reasonable opportunity of applying to the local Poor Law authority for relief and the authority has had an opportunity of considering any such application."[34]

As the Opposition pointed out, this added next to nothing to the Bill; the Local Authorities, unaided by the Government, would go on giving relief or withholding it as before. The Prime Minister himself was now called in to explain matters to the puzzled House, but only succeeded in getting involved in a hopeless attempt to prove that the new clause would relieve the unemployed but at the same time add no new burden to the local rates. Wheatley then made a speech full of concern for the rights of local government, but never managing to explain just how an Exchequer grant would have infringed these rights. In his concluding plea he begged the House "not to treat this as you would treat it in a debating society", by which he presumably meant not to point out the Bill's defects, but "to treat it as something on which depends the happiness of tens of thousands of human beings, to treat it as an emergency Measure, and to give the Bill a Second Reading".[35] By the time the ebullient J. H. Thomas wound up the Debate for the Government, Wheatley's "tens of thousands of human beings" had shrunk considerably; the clause might save "some poor mortal", and "We shall be satisfied if, as a result of our effort, however imperfect it may be, we save one individual from being turned out on the streets".[36] Not surprisingly, the House was less easily satisfied, and rejected the amended clause, albeit by the close

vote of 221 to 212. At the August recess, *The Times* cited this as the most serious of the Government's ten defeats in the Commons during the Session.[37]

A sidelight on the Government's difficulties with Clause One illustrates the Parliamentary Party's resilience under pressure, however. In the interval between the Government's withdrawal of the original Clause and the introduction of its unsatisfactory substitute, a back-bench Labour M.P. named P. C. Hoffman wrote a column in his trade union paper, sadly admitting that "for want of a very clear, firm statement from the very beginning there has been a muddle". Yet later, the concerted attack on the Ministry and its defeat in the Division caused Hoffman to forget that the muddle had, if anything, got worse:

> When MacDonald arose to explain the Government's position after the defeat he was received by continued and sustained cheering on the part of his followers. The scrap, short as it was, indecisive as it was, has, nevertheless, heartened us all greatly, because we feel that the issue is being joined. This is our first real grip with the propertied classes, and it shows the Liberals absolutely divided, but a united Tory Party against a united Labour Party. We would have it so![38]

In the statement to which Hoffman refers, MacDonald finally made it clear that the Government was not prepared to subsidize local rates in support of rent payments. Instead, it was adopting the Prevention of Evictions Bill that had been introduced on 26 March by a group of Liberals, led by E. D. Simon. This Bill made no pretence of meeting the problem of unemployed tenants faced with eviction for non-payment of rent; it merely stiffened the terms on which evictions would be granted to landlords wanting possession for themselves.[39] The Simon Bill passed its Third Reading without a Division—the only Act concerning evictions to become law during the first Labour Government. Three other Liberal bills—one to enable the Exchequer to assist local authorities in making rent payments for unemployed tenants facing eviction, one to extend the period of the existing Rent Restriction Acts, and one to meet the

problem of linking rent levels to changes in local rates—failed to get facilities from the Government.[40]

Certainly the Government's failure to act was not due to lack of pressure. On 5 August, the Clyde brigade revived its campaign to get rents rolled back to their 1914 levels. This time Clynes made the tactical blunder of excusing the Government from action on account of its minority position. The Tories rushed in for the kill: did the Right Honourable Gentleman mean that such a rollback was the Government's policy, from which it was only deterred by its lack of a majority? Clynes was evasive, the Clydesiders threatening. As late as 2 October, a week from the Government's final agony in the House, Clynes was reduced to telling critics that "the whole question of rent restriction is receiving the consideration of the Government as an urgent matter".[41] The position was very much what it had been seven and a half months and six bills earlier, when the Government's "consideration" had begun.

Ministers could hardly blame lack of support in the House for their failure. Liberals had introduced one bill after another dealing with various aspects of the problem, and had given strong support to the principle of stricter controls. Admittedly, some Liberals were unenthusiastic, but the Government never called their bluff by offering a reasonable bill. Instead, it first gave its support to an extreme measure, one which the other parties could safely ridicule while still protesting their sincere desire to deal with the question effectively. When this failed, the Ministry brought in its own Bill, but this again was both radical and ill considered. Only after these two fiascos did the Ministry practise moderation, and then it was moderation carried to the point of inadequacy. The truly socialist approach, surely, was that proposed from Liberal and Tory benches: subsidize the unemployed tenant from the National treasury. This was the one thing the Government refused to do.

Thus the great success of the Housing Bill was somewhat offset by dismal failure over evictions. In housing, with a big, National problem to solve, and the energies of capable men devoted to its solution, there was a bold and ingenious departure, both from the efforts of previous Governments and from

the clichés of previous Labour Party housing doctrine. Evictions, however, were largely a sectional problem, and the section happened to be the Clyde, home of the least moderate Labour M.P.s. The Government, preoccupied with other matters, often tended to let these Members call the tune on evictions; the ill-starred Clause One was a product of Clydeside insistence.[42] Generally speaking, the Government fell back on a series of hasty attempts to put the party's anti-landlord polemics of Opposition days into legislative form. Its Bills were expressions of an attitude, rather than responsible and practical measures. This attitude, which was scarcely more than a natural sympathy for tenants and an antipathy towards landlords, had sufficed in Opposition; it did not provide an adequate basis for action in office.

NOTES

[1]Interview in the *New Leader*, 11 Apr. 1924, p. 11.
[2]For achievements under Addison and Chamberlain schemes, see Ministry of Health, *Fifth Annual Report, 1923–24* (Cmd. 2218), pp. 49–50.
[3]See 13 and 14 George V cap. 24.
[4]John McNair, *James Maxton: Beloved Rebel* (London, 1955), p. 131.
[5]Quotation represents the full title of the Committee's *Report* (Cmd. 2104; 1924). For Committee membership, see *Report*, pp. 5–6.
[6]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2224; ibid., 1837–9 and 1847–8.
[7]Barnes's *Housing: the Facts and the Future*, and Simon's pamphlet, *Houses for All*, reviewed in the *Economist*, 29 Dec. 1923, pp. 1139–40.
[8]172 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1447–95.
[9]*Housing (Financial Provisions)—Memorandum* (Cmd. 2151; 1924).
[10]Interview in the *New Leader*, 4 July 1924, p. 9.
[11]See, e.g. Samuel Roberts's speech on the Third Reading, 176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1639–48.
[12]175 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 122.
[13]ibid., 123.
[14]Major Birchall. 175 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 133–6.
[15]E. D. Simon. 176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1679–80.
[16]174 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1291–1312.
[17]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 676.
[18]174 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1333–4.
[19]*Public Bills*, 8 Jan. 1924 to 9 Oct. 1924, Vol. II, Bill ♯ 167.
[20]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 493–522.

[21]Quoted in Lucy Masterman, *G. F. G. Masterman* (London, 1939), p. 341.
[22]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1674.
[23]Simon, *The Anti-Slum Campaign* (London, 1933), pp. 25–26; figures from Ministry of Health, *Ninth Annual Report* (Cmd. 3185; 1928), p. 71.
[24]See Simon, *Anti-Slum Campaign*, pp. 23–26; Ministry of Health, *Ninth Annual Report*, pp. 71–72.
[25]See 172 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 620; ibid., 911–12; David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt* (London, 1935), Ch. XIV *passim*.
[26]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2171.
[27]ibid., 2204.
[28]See, e.g. Harcourt Johnstone, ibid., 2194–2202.
[29]ibid., 2238.
[30]171 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 25.
[31]ibid., 2197–2205.
[32]ibid., 2261.
[33]ibid., 2718–19.
[34]172 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 103–4.
[35]ibid., 124.
[36]ibid., 137.
[37]*The Times*, 8 Aug. 1924.
[38]*Shop Assistant*, 12 Apr. 1924, p. 283, and 19 Apr. 1924, p. 303.
[39]See 171 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1363–6.
[40]*Public Bills 1924*, I, Bill ♯ 107; IV, Bills ♯ 132 and 115.
[41]177 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 318.
[42]*Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1924-32*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1956), p. 19 (7 Apr. 1924).

IX

UNEMPLOYMENT
The Intractable Million

The housing shortage was a serious problem, but unemployment was a much greater one, more complex and more deeply rooted. It baffled both the inter-war Labour Governments, with important results for the history of the party and the Nation.

Britain's brief post-war boom collapsed late in 1920. Unemployment among insured workers rose from 2.6 per cent in June 1920 to 23.4 per cent in May 1921; it then fell gradually, but upon reaching 10 or 11 per cent in 1923 it seemed to become stabilized at that high level, shifting hardly more than seasonally thereafter until the great depression.[1] In 1924 it was not yet generally realized that this was a chronic condition rather than a temporary slump. Recovery was still expected with some confidence, but until it came unemployment remained the greatest issue of the day. Among men still in work, it is calculated that only one-fifth as many were "in poverty" in 1924 as in 1913, yet two-thirds of this very considerable social gain was counterbalanced by the increase in unemployment.[2] And the concentration of unemployment in certain industries meant that there were regions, the notorious "depressed areas", where economically speaking the sun never shone, and even hope grew dim.

The causes of the post-war unemployment were several.[3] The initial collapse of 1920–1 came largely as a reaction from the soaring inflation of 1914–20. But more important as an explanation of the stubbornness of the unemployment problem, and of its incidence in specific trades, was the dislocation of world markets caused by the war. British absorption in war production meant abandonment of many export markets, which then fell into the hands of the United States or Japan. Worse

yet, the total level of international trade dropped drastically. Because she was peculiarly dependent upon foreign trade, Britain suffered more than other countries, even though she at first maintained her relative share of the total trade. By the mid-1920's, when the European economy began to recover in earnest, Britain began lagging behind. This was partly because, when the country returned to the gold standard in 1925, the pound was over-valued in relation to the dollar by about 10 per cent, which made British exports relatively expensive. But it also reflected the most deeply rooted factor of all: the long process of decline in Britain's relative economic position, accelerated but not caused by the war. Her industrial plant was paying the price for its nineteenth-century head start by suffering from obsolescence in the twentieth century.

Natural human pride, and the habit of success, kept people from a clear view of this problem. The economy was becoming less flexible just when flexibility was most needed. Partly, as in the matter of immobility of labour resulting from wage rigidities, this stemmed from war-time social changes. But more significantly, it came from a tendency, at all levels of the population, to seek economic salvation in defensive measures, such as protection or various kinds of restrictive agreements, rather than by venturing into the reorganization and expansion of the Nation's economy.

Ramsay MacDonald's predecessors in office had done little to cope with the problems of which unemployment was a symptom. The Coalition had first allowed inflation to continue after the war, postponing for a time the strong deflationary measures recommended by the Cunliffe Committee as steps towards restoring the gold standard and Britain's position as financial centre of the world. Then in the 1920 Budget, on the virtual eve of economic collapse, deflation was begun. After that, the policy of the Coalition and of the two Conservative Governments which followed might be summed up as deflationary finance plus doles for the unemployed. Beyond this, the only sign of a general, concerted policy for economic recovery had been Baldwin's ill-fated campaign for tariffs.

The Labour Party poured scorn on these Governments for

the manifest inadequacy of their proposals.[4] Their public works programmes were too timid, and left whole sections of the unemployed, such as the women, unaided; much of what the Government did was in the form of guarantees under the Trade Facilities and Export Credit schemes, and did not represent real expenditure at all. In contrast, Labour promised vigorous action: in the short run, massive public works; in the long run, socialism to cure the basic instability and inequity of capitalism. The mere fact of having Labour in office—men and women whose background enabled them to understand the viewpoint of the unemployed—would, it was suggested, work wonders.[5]

So it was that hopes ran high when the Labour Government was formed, despite its minority position. And in the early weeks there were some successes, at least in the matter of liberalizing unemployed benefits. A one-clause Bill was quickly passed, without real opposition, ending the notorious "gap"—a three-week period, after twelve weeks of uncovenanted benefit (i.e. benefit not covered by payment of premiums), during which benefits were withheld as a deterrent to idleness. Soon after this mild legislative success, the Government passed the first test of its administration in the field of poor relief. Before meeting Parliament, John Wheatley as Minister of Health had rescinded an order of Sir Alfred Mond, issued in 1921 but never enforced, placing restrictions on the granting of relief by the Borough Council of Poplar. The Council, led by George Lansbury and others, had been guilty in Tory and Liberal eyes, of extravagance, as well as of obstreperousness in its efforts to get a reform of the Poor Law.[6] Asquith now caused a sensation, the second day after Parliament met in February, by delivering what sounded like an ultimatum to the Government: "I wish to say in the plainest and most unequivocal terms, that unless the Government can see their way, as I hope they will, to reconsider their action . . . I do not think there is the least chance of that administrative act receiving the countenance or approval of the House of Commons."[7] Had the Liberals stuck to their guns, the Labour Government might have fallen within the week. But when the debate came, Wheatley pointed out that the Mond order was a dead letter; that all that he had

done was to remove a discrimination against Poplar and to place that Borough on the same legal ground as all others: extravagance that was punishable anywhere would still be punishable at Poplar. The speech made his reputation overnight. Asquith told Snowden "that in all his Parliamentary experience he had never heard a Minister make a more convincing defence of his action".[8] When the Tories moved to censure the Government anyhow, only ten Liberals joined them in the lobby. The Ministry emerged triumphant, while Asquith's party, which had so recently boasted of its whip-hand over the Government, was exposed to the jeers of Conservatives and Labour alike.

The Ministry moved on from these satisfying minor victories to eventual passage of an important Act amending the Insurance Acts in several particulars. Payments were raised, from twelve shillings per week to fifteen for women, from fifteen to eighteen for men; the children's allowance was doubled—to two shillings. Conditions of benefit were liberalized in several details. After a hard fight, the Government managed to retain a provision whereby uncovenanted benefit became the right of all insured persons, not dependent upon the decision of the Minister of Labour. There was a protracted and intricate wrangle over the extension of unemployment benefit to persons thrown out of work by a strike in which they were not participants; at one point, the Left wing of the Labour Party forced a Division against their own Government, and mustered seventy-four votes. In the Bill's final stages, poor Tom Shaw, the textile trade unionist who was Minister of Labour, found himself battling to prevent his colleagues from writing in amendments which he could not accept. As it was, he had to swallow the bitter pill of a Liberal Amendment shortening the waiting period for claiming benefit from six days to three—at a cost of £4.5 million a year. And he was forced to withdraw a clause extending unemployment benefit to children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, after the Liberals had gleefully attacked it as a reactionary measure which would encourage parents to take children out of school, a National Conference of Labour Women had condemned it, and Lady Astor had urged the Government to raise the school leaving age instead.[9]

In the field of unemployment insurance benefits, then, the Government accomplished something for its supporters in the back streets. This was true on balance, despite the fact that introduction of a new disqualification, "not genuinely seeking work", resulted in a considerable increase in the number of disallowances of benefit in 1925.[10] But liberalized benefits were not enough. The party had criticized its predecessors in office unsparingly for relying on doles instead of providing work. Now Labour had the opportunity, and the obligation, to act.

In his initial statement of Government policy in the House on 12 February, MacDonald's comments on unemployment seemed to aim largely at calming people's fears of socialist extravagance. The first need was to put men to work, he said:

> Consequently, we shall concentrate, not first of all on the relief of unemployment, but on the restoration of trade. We are not going to diminish industrial capital in order to provide relief. . . . I wish to make it perfectly clear that the Government have no intention of drawing off from the normal channels of trade large sums for extemporised measures which can only be palliatives.[11]

In specific terms, he announced that the Government would "speed up the Trade Facilities Act", extend the Export Credit scheme, and push certain public works, among them land drainage, light railways, and roads. This was all that MacDonald said about public works, except for a noncommittal reference to the special needs of unemployed women, and his confidence in the ability of Margaret Bondfield, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour,* to meet them.

The formula sounded sadly familiar, as the Opposition was not slow to point out. But Labour supporters remained confident. "There is nothing novel in this plan," said the *New Leader* on 15 February. "What will be novel will be the scale and the driving force behind it." A week later, the paper was still certain that the Government would soon "expand its programme rapidly". But already troubles had arisen. The first measure aimed at providing work was an extension of the Trade

*In 1929, the first woman Cabinet Minister.

Facilities Acts, originally enacted in 1920–2, under which the Government undertook to guarantee loans to British firms for various purposes. The chief change now proposed was to raise the maximum permitted total of such guarantees, from £50 million to £65 million—a modest proposal, considering that the total losses sustained by His Majesty's Government to date had been £4,000. The Government was soon in difficulties with its own Members, however, because the increase was to cover guaranteeing the remainder of a loan, part of which had already been raised, to a cotton-growing syndicate in the Sudan. Thomas Johnston, M.P. and editor of the *Forward*, asked embarrassing questions. Would the syndicate's profits be controlled? Was the cotton growing economic—what would the Sudan cotton cost? Was African labour being exploited, and had natives been dispossessed under the scheme?

William Graham, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, defended the Sudan guarantee, but with obvious discomfort. It was true that the syndicate had once made big profits, but more recently it had made none. The Government was already committed to the programme by its predecessors; to draw back now would be to risk up to £10 million in guarantees already granted. But all this was not sufficient to keep several back-bench Labourites from outspoken attacks upon the proposal, charging colonialism and profiteering. The Government carried the Second Reading by 297 to 43, but 30 of the minority were its own supporters.[12]

There were no more controversies as exotic as Sudan cotton. But disillusionment grew during the Government's first six months in office, as one unemployment debate after another went by without the announcement of any significant innovations of policy. On the question of unemployed women, Miss Bondfield was reduced to rhapsodizing about "the great work of all housewives in the country in making the home, and in developing that home life which has been the backbone and mainstay of this country", while her chief, Tom Shaw, was telling a TUC deputation that "So far as he was concerned, the problem of finding adequate suitable work for unemployed women baffled him. Suggestions of any kind would be very

welcome."[13] On 10 March, taunted by his critics in the House with the fact that all the specific schemes mentioned so far had been initiated by previous Governments, Shaw uttered a response that was to haunt him and his colleagues for the rest of their Ministerial lives: "Yes; they have been agreed to by the previous Government. Does anybody think that we can produce schemes like rabbits out of our hat?"[14] Ten weeks later, he was to be found boasting that unemployment had been reduced by 240,000 since Labour had taken office. Yes, said a Liberal critic, but last year the seasonal fall in unemployment was 280,000. Ah, but that had been an accident, replied Shaw; this year, it was MacDonald's foreign policy successes that accounted for the improvement. In fact he spent so much time talking about the Prime Minister's European triumphs that the Chairman had to call him to order for wandering from the subject of the debate.[15]

Meanwhile the pressure for action mounted. Tories in Parliament lashed the unhappy Ministers with quotations from their own speeches of earlier years. Masterman, for the Liberals, parodied Shaw's account of public works projects:

> On one an expert committee would be appointed. On another the Government were considering it. On a third, the Government were now considering the possibility. On the fourth, the negotiations were still continuing. On the fifth, the Government intended to make investigations. On the sixth, the Government were unable to give an absolute declaration. On the seventh, the Government would undertake any scheme which could be suggested to them.[16]

To the excuse that the other parties would kill any really big plans that Labour might bring forth, Masterman replied, "Bring in the schemes; that is all we ask." And Labour opinion, in the House and out, was beginning to echo his demand. "It is no secret," said the *New Leader* of 23 May, "that the whole party is deeply anxious over the delay in undertaking or even announcing anything much beyond the schemes which the late Government had set in motion. . . ."

By 29 May, when Tom Shaw's salary was to be debated, there seemed some chance that the Government would fail to

survive the accumulated discontent. A week previously, the vote had been 244–210, with 16 Liberals voting against the Government and 61 abstaining—nearly half the Parliamentary Party all told. To meet the threat, the Prime Minister was called in, and managed to score some effective points against the Conservatives who were now so vehement but who had done so little when they were in office. But at the same time he made a most revealing admission:

> Until you have been in office, until you have seen those files warning Cabinet Ministers of the dangers of legislation, or that sort of thing, you have not had the experience of trying to carry out what seems to be a simple thing, but which becomes a complex, an exceedingly difficult, and a laborious and almost heartbreaking thing when you come to be a member of a Cabinet in a responsible Government.[17]

Thus had the wheel come full circle, all three parties having experienced bafflement over this problem.

When the vote actually came, Labour did a bit better than before; the Liberals were disinclined to advertise their internal differences by any further divided voting, and there was a general feeling that a new election at that point would solve nothing. Rather than ejecting the Government, *The Times* suggested, the older parties should go on prodding it and holding it responsible.[18]

On 30 July, the Board of Trade announced a modest but constructive step: the appointment of a committee, under Sir Arthur Balfour (later Lord Riverdale), chairman of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, "to report upon the conditions and prospects of British industry and commerce, with special reference to the export trade".[19] Also on 30 July, what proved to be the last full dress Commons debate on the Labour Government's unemployment policy took place. This time, the Ministerial team had managed to pull itself together somewhat. Yet the debate was paradoxical, for it demonstrated both that the Government was at last planning some major public works, and that Ministers were becoming disillusioned with the whole idea of curing unemployment by any such means.

Philip Snowden led off for the Government, and early in his speech argued that "you are never going to settle the unemployment problem, you are never going to mitigate it to any extent, by making work". This did not mean, however, that public works were to be abandoned. For one thing, the Chancellor pointed out, Britain's industry was relatively inefficient; public works could help to raise productivity, and put the country in a position to win its share of any future improvement in world trade. With this in mind, the Government was undertaking a major programme in the development of electricity. It would do the job of standardizing frequencies all over Britain; this would take three years and cost £10 million. Next, the Government hoped to plan, in co-operation with the producers of electric power and the Electricity Commissioners, a main transmission system, or "grid", for the Nation. This would be constructed with the aid of grants from the Government, to cover the period before net revenue became sufficient to cover charges. There would also be the development of rural electrification by State subsidy, but here nothing specific had been worked out yet. Finally, there was the long-discussed Severn Barrage scheme for harnessing the tides to produce electricity: the Government was setting up a committee "to seek advice as to the nature and scope of the inquiries which will be necessary" to see whether or not the project was practical.[20]

This was at least a stirring of the air, after the dead calm of previous Government pronouncements. It impressed the House at the time, and it is evidence that the Labour Government might have accomplished something in public works, had it lived longer. To read the forceful and imaginative speech on electrical development delivered by the Back-bencher, Herbert Morrison, at the Party Conference in 1924, and contrast it with the dull, platitudinous promotion of coal nationalization at the same Conference, is to get an inkling of what the party might do in the future.[21]

For the moment, however, critics were not lacking to point out, first that the Government's schemes were clearly far from matured, and second that they consisted once more of borrowings from earlier tenants of Whitehall. It was recalled that five

weeks earlier, Sidney Webb had deprecated the idea that the compulsory powers of the Electricity Commissioners, lost in the mutilation of Lloyd George's scheme in 1919, would have to be restored.[22] Yet now Snowden announced that such a restoration would be the first step in the Government's plan. It was on 22 June that Haldane told Mrs. Webb that he had "at last" got the Cabinet Committee to begin serious work towards an electricity scheme. As recently as 9 July, the Government had announced that it would allow a free vote on the Lanarkshire Hydro-electric Power Bill, although this proposal for private development might conflict with later public schemes, because plans for public development were not far enough advanced to warrant blocking the measure. Finally, the reply given by MacDonald on 29 October to inquiries from the Federation of British Industries remained very vague on the subject of electricity, among others; it was a mosaic of such evasions as, "Obviously it is impossible at this moment to enter into details of the contemplated arrangements".[23]

It is probably not unfair to assume, then, that the Government's electricity schemes were brought forth hurriedly, while still in embryo, to silence Parliamentary critics, and that the close resemblances between Labour's plan and Lloyd George's book, *Coal and Power* (the first fruits of his ambitious research teams), which appeared earlier in July, were not wholly coincidental; both had their origins in the abortive Coalition project of 1919.

In any case, this debate of 30 July marks the end of an episode in Labour thinking about unemployment. The *New Leader* sadly concluded, the following week, that public works were inadequate "to the magnitude of the post-war problem"; "Though they sound imposing and provide material for excellent speeches full of figures and solid arguments, they do not amount to much when tested by the light of experience and practical administration".[24] Ministers had begun to learn the gap between paper programmes and reality. They were learning how long a time was likely to elapse between embarking on a project and seeing some positive results; of an £8,050,000 road-building programme launched in October 1923, only

£32,000 had been spent by 31 March 1924. They were learning, too, about previously unsuspected obstacles in their path. Faced with an outcry for more afforestation projects, Ministers said they had discovered that the Forestry Commission was an independent body, beyond their direct control. Then bring them under your control, cried the back-benches. Ah, yes, but that would require legislation, and the calendar was already full to overflowing.[25]

Inevitably, too, the leaders, who had now had experience of what it meant to face such obstacles and carry such responsibilities, tended to react against the impracticality of many suggestions showered upon them from sections of the party. The ILP Unemployment Committee's notion of Government co-operation with private industry in reducing unemployment was simple: "We suggest that the Government should issue an ultimatum that either the [railway] companies must proceed with this work, or face the alternative of an immediate nationalization Bill."[26] An ultimatum by 192 Labour members—the entire remainder of MacDonald's career only becomes comprehensible in the light of recommendations such as this.

It must be admitted, however, that the first Labour Government gave just cause for complaint by its unimaginativeness in developing public works projects, and its timidity about spending money on them. Snowden remarked, with feeling, that the time to attack unemployment is before it strikes; schemes must be prepared "when Governments have leisure, and they must be got ready to be put into operation as soon as ever the need arises".[27] This Government, especially, lacked leisure; Ministers had quite enough on their hands to learn their jobs, and to take care of emergencies in their own bailiwicks, such as the series of major strikes that Tom Shaw had on his hands, as Minister of Labour. Several first-hand observers have stated that it was this lack of time to make plans which, more than anything else, hindered the Government.[28] According to one recollection, Snowden was called before the Parliamentary Labour Party Executive to discuss the failure to produce unemployment schemes, and "proved to the satisfaction of the Executive that he had not refused money for any work schemes for the good

and sufficient reason that nobody had produced any schemes".[29]

There is some evidence that the stream of ideas was drying up at the local level, too. Over the three years prior to February 1924 schemes for Exchequer aid towards paying the wages bills for local public works projects through the Unemployment Grants Committee had been approved at an average rate of almost £350,000 per month; in the first four months of the Labour Government, the figure was only £106,000 per month, although the Government had raised the limit upon this form of aid in order that the money should not be lacking. The number of schemes submitted, and the number approved, also dropped, both for this type of aid and for Government grants towards interest and sinking fund charges on loans for local projects.[30]

Of the less direct forms of aid, guarantees under the Trade Facilities Acts averaged a bit higher than in previous years, but the Export Credits scheme languished; the amount in use or earmarked for use on 2 June 1924, was £6,299,000, as against £8,183,550 on 4 February. In June, £19,701,000 was available under this scheme and not in use.[31]

It is clear that finding acceptable schemes was difficult, that the Government showed little imagination along these lines, and that it did not organize itself effectively to carry on the search. Snowden, Sidney Webb at the Board of Trade, and Shaw had most to do with unemployment; when a Cabinet Committee was set up, Snowden was its chairman. But, as George Lansbury complained, no one Minister had responsibility in the matter.[32] No "economic general staff", such as Sir William Beveridge recommended, was set up; the expedient of leaving the problem in the hands of Ministers not greatly burdened with other departmental matters, tried in 1929–31, was not introduced. Imagination and initiative may have been stultified, however, by the extraordinary reluctance of the Exchequer, under a Labour Chancellor, to spend money.

There is no doubt that this reluctance was, to most Labourites, an unexpected obstacle. In his books on finance under a future Labour régime, Snowden had casually dismissed the problem of finding money for major projects: heavier taxation

of the rich was the answer.[33] His financial conservatism in office was so unexpected, in fact, that it passed largely unrecognized for a time. In June, after four months of proper Gladstonianism in Whitehall, after a Budget which Liberals had tumbled over each other to applaud, the ILP Unemployment Committee's report gave just one sentence to the matter of financing its public works recommendations: "A great Unemployment Loan should be floated to enable this programme to be carried through on the bold lines necessary." There is no sign that the Committee was aware of the cold welcome any such proposal would meet in the Cabinet, although the Prime Minister had clearly warned, back in February, that the needs of unemployment relief would "be judged in relation to the greater necessity for maintaining undisturbed the ordinary financial facilities and resources of trade and industry". As late as August, the *Socialist Review* appears completely ignorant of the real direction of Snowden's economic thinking, and in fact utterly misreads the evidence available:

> Mr. Philip Snowden is chairman of the Cabinet Committee which is considering the schemes. This is all to the good, for, as his conduct of the Budget has shown, Mr. Snowden possesses both courage and driving force. Moreover, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he will know how to provide the necessary finance, and no undue delay will arise whilst Treasury opinion is sought.[34]

Yet evidence abounds that finance was a major stumbling block. At the Trade Union Congress in 1924, Julia Varley, speaking from experience in trying to get projects for women from the Government, commented ruefully that "when you get to the people who are supposed to have the money and they tell you they have not got it, we cannot take them by the scruff of the neck and make them pay up." At the Lord Mayor's Dinner in the City, Snowden compared himself to a "man with his back to the wall, fighting off a pack of ravenous wolves".[35] Privately, he was even more explicit, according to Beatrice Webb's account of the dinner at which the decision to accept office was taken, in December 1923: "What came out was that Snowden, who thinks he has a right to be Chancellor of the

Exchequer, is chicken-hearted and will try to cut down expenditure—he even demurred to a programme of public works for the unemployed. Where was the money to come from? he asked, with a Treasury Clerk's intonation."[36] No doubt his attitude had much to do with the Cabinet's maintenance, in the face of vehement protests from the Liberals, of the principle that public works schemes must be revenue-producing—in the long run, self-supporting—to qualify for Government aid.[37]

But the interesting and significant point is that Beatrice Webb's scorn was wholly unrepresentative of the Labour movement. Snowden was generally admired; his faults—a corrosive tongue, and a "fierce certitude of himself"[38] bordering on contempt for the opinions of others—were excused, partly out of admiration for his undeniably great abilities,* and partly out of sympathy for the physical handicap that forced him to walk with the aid of two sticks. Labourites looked forward to his first Budget, in April 1924, with considerable excitement.

The City had once anticipated this event with excitement of a rather different sort; what could they expect from "the outstanding moral and intellectual force in the Labour Party . . . overwhelmingly sincere in his fierce determination to overturn the existing order of society"?[39] Their fears were much abated in February, however, when MacDonald announced that the problem of the National Debt was to be handed to a Committee of "men of business . . . whose work and whose judgment will be accepted by the whole intelligent business community". Perhaps no one had expected that the capital levy would be brought forth to face the withering blasts of the Tory-Liberal majority. Not only was the levy abandoned, however, but the investigating committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Colwyn, a manufacturer, with pro-Labour members outnumbered eight to five, provided a convenient forum for polemics against high taxes as impediments to business enter-

*Sir Charles Trevelyan considers Snowden "the outstanding member of the Government". (Interview with the author, 9 June 1952) Mr J. S. Middleton, for many years secretary of the party, adds "The greatest propagandist Labour ever had". (Interview, 29 Dec. 1951).

prise. Conservatives would have been even more mollified had they been able to read Snowden's later admission that the levy was dropped because it "had now become an electoral millstone", and "the financial and trade condition of the country was such as to make the proposal impracticable".[40]

Sir Robert Horne's and Stanley Baldwin's budgets of 1922–3 and 1923–4 had each anticipated a small surplus, and in the event each had produced a large one, which was automatically applied to debt redemption. By keeping taxes at their existing levels, Snowden could have continued this "overbudgeting", or used the surplus to pay for several modest instalments of social services, or a substantial direct attack on unemployment. Instead, he took the indirect road, moving towards freer trade and lower taxes in hopes of stimulating expansion, while keeping a small over-all surplus and continuing to whittle away at the National Debt. The new sinking fund, begun by Baldwin

TABLE A

Budget	Estimated Surplus	Realized Surplus
1922–3	£706,000	£101,516,000
1923–4	£1,884,000	£48,329,000
1924–5	£4,024,000	£3,659,000

Figs. taken from Sir Bernard Mallet and C. O. George, *British Budgets*, 3rd Series, 1921–2 to 1932–3 (London, 1933), pp. 429–33.

in 1923, was kept intact, with its automatic increase (by £5 million) to £45 million. The sugar duty was reduced from $2\frac{3}{4}d$ per pound to $1\frac{1}{4}d$; the duties on tea, cocoa, coffee and chicory were halved. The entertainment tax was lowered on tickets costing less than 1*s* 6*d*, and eliminated on those at 6*d* and less. The inhabited house duty, a disguised income tax of some nuisance power, was abolished; so, *mirabile dictu*, was the corporation profits tax. Finally, the McKenna Duties, taxes placed on the importation of several items, notably automobiles, during the war, were ended.[41]

Thus while no taxes were increased, indirect taxes were cut by £29 million, and direct taxes by £14.5 million. This was a mild enough shift in incidence, especially since the two preceding budgets had reduced direct taxes by £88.5 million and indirect taxes by only £22 million. The socialist Chancellor had gone only one-fourth of the way towards making up this discrepancy, and he had done so, moreover, not by raising the taxes of the rich, but merely by giving them somewhat less tax relief than he gave the poor. Why this kindness?

Clearly it was not Labour's minority position alone. Philip Snowden was far too courageous a man to coddle the wealthy for the sake of a few weeks more in office. He had once written: "Public requirements, social reform, ought not to remain unsatisfied so long as there is untaxed rent, interest, and profit appropriated by individuals." But at the same time he had expressed concern over threats to "the precarious income of the hard-working businessman". More recently, but still in the comparatively carefree days of Opposition, he had called for the abolition of the corporation profits tax as a hindrance to investment; had announced that a Labour Government would lower the income tax on earned income, and "would do nothing by taxation to hinder the development of useful trade and employment, or to discourage a man from working hard to increase his income, to save for a modest competence, *or to restrict saving for capital investment*".[42]

When the private investor joined the working businessman as an object of Labour's solicitude, the circle of persons whose wealth it would be legitimate to redistribute had become narrow indeed. The Chancellor did promise the Parliamentary Labour Party that "this Budget is the prelude to the next, it is a preparation for bigger things". He had, after all, scarcely had sufficient time in office to prepare a financial revolution, even had he so desired. But the evidence is that these "bigger things" meant just one thing: a tax on land values. This one group of potential taxpayers, the land-owners, still stood outside the charmed circle of those immune from the Radical Chancellor's attack. In preparation for the assault, he promised a short bill to restore powers to the Land Valuation Office.[43]

Most Labour commentators were content with this. The *New Leader* voiced a momentary doubt as to whether the Chancellor had left himself enough money to pay for the Government's social programme, including public works, but it then went on to praise "this skilful and popular Budget" unstintingly.[44] The question scarcely arose whether or not it was good for employment to maintain a balanced budget, coupled with a persistent, though hardly heroic, effort at debt reduction. The assumption on all sides was that Britain's honour required it, and that recovery was only to be found in a return to the gold standard as soon as possible. For the most part, the budget was considered almost *in vacuo*, and not in connexion with the unemployment problem. In the volume of Hansard containing the budget speech, there are only four references to unemployment among the 250-odd listings under "Budget" in the index. The *Socialist Review* on one page criticized the Government for not providing lavish public works in relief of unemployment; on another, it praised the budget for "courageous reduction of taxation"; nowhere did it betray any recognition that to achieve both these goals at once would have necessitated an unbalanced budget.[45]

Far more excitement was caused by the repeal of the McKenna Duties. Despite the fact that these were originally levied to conserve shipping during the war, and despite the clear electoral defeat of protection, the Tories put up a fight over this. Headlines in the *Daily Express* screamed: "MURDERING OUR MOTOR INDUSTRY: FIRST DISMISSAL OF WORKERS." Protest meetings were held—staged by employers, said Snowden—and petitions poured in from the automobile centres. Amid fantastic statistics on the number of people who would lose their jobs, Stanley Baldwin made a plea, "not to the intellectuals, but for those who have worked with their hands", not to make it harder for "the fellows in the works" to find employment. And there were Labour protests, from a minority no doubt, but far more vocal than the scattered critics of deflationary finance. Much of the agitation was artificially induced by the employers, but the Birmingham Division of the Amalgamated Engineering Union spoke in

June of "the scare with regard to the abolition of the McKenna Duties having somewhat subsided", implying that it had been real. A. A. Purcell, M.P. for Coventry and TUC President, together with two other Labourites, tabled an Amendment to continue the Duties until May 1925, and Snowden received a deputation from the National Union of Vehicle Workers asking (in vain) for postponement of repeal.[46] In fact, there were more doubts in the Labour movement about free trade than about most aspects of Snowdenite liberalism. While only five Labour Members voted for the Imperial Preference Resolutions which were narrowly defeated in July 1924, the core of the Clyde Members abstained. After the Government's fall, John Wheatley broke openly with free trade, describing it as "outrageously anti-socialist", and arguing that "if socialism is to be established piecemeal the structure must be protected from Capitalism as it is erected".[47]

But this, the one real controversy aroused by the Budget, failed to outweigh the load of congratulations heaped upon Snowden. *Forward* was jubilant: "The housewife knows this week that the Labour Government is in earnest and means business." The *Socialist Review* exulted:

> Philip Snowden is the hero of the month. He has accomplished the hitherto apparently impossible. His brilliant Budget speech was hailed with rapturous applause from the united Labour ranks, and at the same time, swept the Liberals off their feet. The sole criticism seriously advanced is of his "optimism". That optimism represents a justified expectation that the Government will remain in power at least another twelve months. . . . Liberals promise; we perform—there is no valid answer to that now.

Even Mrs. Webb, in her diary, rescinded her harsh judgment of Snowden and applauded his triumph. When one lone speaker at the Party Conference that autumn dared complain that "no attempt was made to increase the taxation on the capitalists and the financiers", he was silenced by Clynes's assertion that Labour's first Budget must be good; otherwise why were their opponents so anxious to throw them out of office before there could be a second?[48]

How can we account for the failure of most Labourites even to comprehend, let alone to criticize, the extent to which their Government, and particularly the Chancellor of the Exchequer, were exhibiting loyalty to Cobdenism rather than to socialism? Part of the answer lies in the confusion and lack of agreement within the party upon economic questions. While the Government was still in office, and struggling to think up acceptable public works projects, one member of the Cabinet, Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, was making speeches against "artificially creating work less useful than that which would be put in hand by the normal use of the taxpayers' money if left in their own pockets to spend". After the fall of the Government, Wedgwood initiated a controversy on this theme in the columns of the *Daily Herald.* His fellow controversialists exhibited an enormous variety of viewpoints; most of them appear to have been very much at sea among the economic questions at issue, and it is easy to see why they were in no position to take issue with Snowden on such matters.* Similarly, at the ILP Summer School in 1924, every conceivable viewpoint on monetary policy seems to have been expressed, with no majority for any of them. The editor of the *New Leader*, H. N. Brailsford, did grow steadily more restive under the Government's tame acceptance of the same deflationary, pro-gold standard outlook as its predecessors. But Hugh Dalton, writing in the same columns, scornfully attacked J. M. Keynes for advocating public works at the expense of debt redemption; this was "mere Lloyd George finance. Our provision for the reduction of debt is at present only a pathetic trickle, which should be swelled into a great stream rather than dried up at the source."[49]

When Labour speakers declared, as they did with unwearying insistence, that "Socialism is the only cure for unemployment", they again meant a bewildering variety of things by it. Sometimes it was sincerely believed that unemployment was

**Westminster Gazette*, 2 June 1924; *Daily Herald*, 5–10 Jan. 1925. Wedgwood's own socialism was so unorthodox that he once voted against raising the school leaving age, as involving undue compulsion. (C. V. Wedgwood, *Last of the Radicals* (London, 1951), p. 151.) But he *was* a Cabinet member in 1924, and afterwards even passed for a member of the Left Wing for a time.

nothing but a dirty trick played by the capitalists on purpose. Without the pressure of an unemployed reserve of labour, employers would be unable to keep wages down and the workers under control.[50] This was a convenient theory, since it obviated the necessity of thinking about the balance of trade, problems of investment, or any other complicated matters. But it was of little help to Ministers dealing with the immediate realities of the situation, or to potential critics of Ministerial behaviour either.

Another interpretation was that unemployment would be abolished under socialism by a fearless use of the engine of State to do the things which private enterprise either would not or could not do. But the Labour Government shrank from such a course, not only because it was in a minority in Parliament but because it did not believe in it. Often the Ministry appeared hardly conscious of the possibility that businessmen and socialists might take differing views as to how it ought to be spending money. Not until late August did even the *New Leader* suggest that perhaps it was time that someone besides the incumbent two bankers and an accountant from the City sat on the Committee that passed on schemes submitted for aid under the Trade Facilities Acts. The Government could not be expected to promote State socialism under a Prime Minister who had written of the primary need "to cut down Whitehall expenditure and to lop off many of the tentacles which it has thrust out over the country". Had it overcome this obstacle, there remained the Chancellor who wanted above all to protect enterprise from "the futile and benumbing palliatives of subsidies and protective duties".[51]

To a vocal minority of Labourites, Oswald Mosley among them, socialism would mean primarily the chance to control credit, and thus iron out the business cycle. But although Labour supporters were prone to suspect the worst of those who control credit under capitalism, there was no agreement as to what sort of control should be introduced by a Labour Government, or for what purpose. Keynes, who published *Monetary Reform* in 1924 and supported it by strong articles in the *Nation* and elsewhere, was not in touch with Labour opinion. He had spoken

against Labour in the 1923 campaign: MacDonald, commenting upon Keynes's pet project, the Liberal Summer School, and presumably upon Keynes's own address there on the evils of deflationary finance, poured scorn on "every mad thing said . . . at Cambridge by Liberal schoolmasters", and described their deliberations as "very wordy, very academic, and very feeble".[52] Labourites had welcomed Keynes's polemic against the Versailles Peace, but in so far as they had considered his ideas on finance, they probably agreed with the sneers of Dalton already cited. Association with Lloyd George—and Keynes had eagerly picked up Lloyd George's call for a big public works programme, in the spring of 1924—was a certain path to most Labourites' deep distrust. Two years later, Beatrice Webb considered briefly the possibility that Keynes might be the one to "discover how to control the wealth of nations in the public interest". It is a fleeting reference; there is more significance in her still later statement: "The net result is Agnosticism—I simply *do not know* what is happening in national finance still less what *ought* to happen."[53]

At the 1924 Party Conference, H. N. Brailsford moved an amendment, on behalf of the ILP, calling for the control of credit by measures including the nationalization of the Bank of England. This was passed, without a dissenting speech, on a show of hands.[54] But one may well ask what meaning can be attached to a vote which would seem so casually to reverse the established policy of the Labour Government. One need not wonder what Philip Snowden, the ardent admirer of Sir Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank, must have thought on the subject.

Most Labourites, when they talked of socialism curing unemployment, simply meant that it would end the underconsumption inherent in capitalism. A socialist Government would transfer purchasing power from the rich to the poor, by taxation and social policy, with the result that the effective demand for goods would be maintained at high levels.[55] Yet in practice this turned out to mean three halfpence taken off the price of sugar. The moment it got beyond this, concern for the safety of the investor's shillings called a halt.

Finally, there were those who argued that socialism would cure unemployment simply by having the State acquire the key industries and assume physical possession and control over them. Here, perhaps, was the forerunner of modern planning, but in 1924 it was little more than a platform phrase; the State should have "absolute power of control over all its resources, so that in time of need they can be used for the greatest advantage of the greatest number of its citizens", as one Election Address put it.[56] A much better foretaste of the Labour Government's attitude was contained in Ramsay MacDonald's warnings in 1923 against "wanton interference . . . however good its paper justification" with the "delicate mechanism" of international trade.[57]

But it is unnecessary to press the point further. The fact is that the Labour Party was alive with conflicting opinions as to what socialism meant, and what it could do to end unemployment. There was no agreement as to the content of socialist economics; indeed, the study of economics, especially finance, was itself often suspect, in Labour circles, as a kind of private invention of the capitalists. Any thorny point in economics, then, became merely a false dilemma, tossed in the path of good, straightforward socialists by the guardians of entrenched privilege. Or, alternatively, economics was regarded as an entirely neutral study, objectively scientific. To speak of "socialist fiscal policy" or "reactionary fiscal policy" would, in this view, be almost tantamount to talking of "socialist geology" or "reactionary chemical engineering". Thus William Graham, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, could rationalize his own blending of socialist politics with *laissez-faire* economics by saying that "there was a vast field, especially in finance, which did not lend itself to party politics". And Snowden, in his *Autobiography*, expresses his admiration for Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank, in terms which again suggest this belief in the complete separability of economics from politics: "I know nothing at all about his politics. I do not know if he has any. A man's real politics arise from his temperament and feeling. And the Governor's nature is essentially democratic. I should say that he hates snobbery and class distinctions."[58]

Writing in 1923, "Seven Members of the Labour Party" saw that the instinct of most of their fellows was simply to try, by social legislation, taxation, and collective bargaining, to improve the workers' standard of living at the expense of the owners and employers. But, they continued, some Labourites realized that the eventual result of this might be to make the capitalists unable to perform their function, without having set up any substitute mechanism to do the job in their place. "Having no adequate alternative to offer to capitalist enterprise," they concluded, "we are obliged to be tender to the capitalist's prejudice, and to establish the proposition that none of our proposals will do him any real injury."[59]

That the party was in this predicament was not, of course, widely admitted at the time. Labour supporters might be disappointed, even deeply troubled, by the fact that the unemployed still numbered 1,280,681, with no improvement in sight, when the Government fell in October.[60] Mrs. Webb had already confessed, privately, the leadership's fault "in implying, if not asserting, that the prevention of unemployment was an easy and rapid task instead of being a difficult and slow business involving many complicated transactions and far more control of capitalist enterprise than anyone has yet worked out."[61] But for most Labourites, the natural human tendency to cling to familiar ideas, and to blame the other fellow for one's own shortcomings, obscured the dimensions of the party's failure in unemployment. There was a tendency to attribute this failure to the Government's minority position, although it would be difficult to find an instance in which the Cabinet found itself thwarted on the unemployment issue by an adverse majority in the House of Commons. Snowden, ably abetted on the technical side by the machine-like memory for figures of Willie Graham, continued to dominate the party in matters of finance. For the most part, he was taken at his own valuation, which was high. Few indeed were the Labourites who thought of questioning the soundness of his judgment, or the sincerity of his socialist convictions. For all his air of the cold, scientific calculator, he had at the same time an unsurpassed command of the moral rhetoric of Labour evangelism.[62] He contributed no little

to the party's fondness for confusing economic with ethical questions—a habit which makes for strong morale, by implying more or less directly that other parties suffer from a failure to see the moral implications of economic policies, but which can also be a deterrent to clear thinking.*

For the most part, the party emerged little the wiser from the 1924 experience with unemployment. The full price of failure to grasp the inadequacy of Labour's unemployment policy was not paid until the humiliation of 1931. At that time, the bulk of the party, still unable to offer more than a kind of blind resistance to the implications of their own economic thinking, were deserted by that small group of leaders who had much the same economic ideas as they, but less loyalty to the sentiments, the slogans, and the instinct for solidarity which bound together the Labour movement.

*The author has heard the problem of the dollar gap described by a Labour M.P. in the election campaign of 1951 as "not an economic problem at all, but a moral problem".

NOTES

[1]Ministry of Labour, *18th Abstract of Labour Statistics* (Cmd. 2740; 1926), p. 50.

[2]A. L. Bowley, *Some Economic Consequences of the Great War* (London, 1930), p. 164.

[3]See, *inter alia*, W. A. Lewis, *Economic Survey 1919–39* (London, 1950), esp. Ch. V; Alfred E. Kahn, *Great Britain in the World Economy* (New York, 1946); A. C. Pigou, *Aspects of British Economic History, 1918–25* (London, 1948); G. D. H. Cole, *British Trade and Industry* (London, 1932); and C. L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918–40* (Chicago, 1955), Ch. V.

[4]See Labour Party-TUC National Joint Council, *Work and Wages Campaign: Facts for Speakers* (London, 1923).

[5]J. R. MacDonald, *A Policy for the Labour Party* (London, 1920), p. 144.

[6]For "Poplarism", see Raymond Postgate, *Life of George Lansbury* (London, 1951).

[7]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 863.

[8]Philip Snowden, *Autobiography* (London, 1934), II, 631.

[9]See debates on the Unemployment Insurance [illegible]2 Bill, in 173–6 H.C. Deb., 5 s.; for the Labour Women's Conference, see *New Leader*, 23 May 1924, p. 2.

[10]R. C. Davison, *The Unemployed: Old Policies and New* (London, 1929), p. 118.
[11]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 759–60.
[12]See debates on Trade Facilities Amendment Bill, 169–70 H.C. Deb., 5 s., esp. Vol. 169: 1622–4 and 170: 1281–8; also *Forward*, 15 March 1924.
[13]170 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2082; TUC *Annual Report*, 1924, p. 30.
[14]170 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2003.
[15]173 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2446–50.
[16]ibid., 2463.
[17]174 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 651.
[18]*The Times*, 28 and 30 May 1924.
[19]*The Times*, 30 July 1924. The Committee issued several reports, the final one in 1929.
[20]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2091–2114.
[21]*Report*, pp. 147–52.
[22]174 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2402–3; see Lloyd George's comments, 176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2137–8.
[23]*Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1956), p. 31; *The Times*, 10 July 1924; ibid., 15 Nov. 1924.
[24]*New Leader*, 8 Aug. 1924, p. 6.
[25]*Provision of Work for Relief of Unemployment* (Cmd. 2196; 1924), p. 7; 175 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 552–555.
[26]Quoted in *New Leader*, 20 June 1924, p. 8.
[27]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2098.
[28]A. Fenner Brockway, M.P., and the Rt. Hon. Emanuel Shinwell, M.P., interviews with the author, 15 and 27 May 1952, respectively; see also below, Ch. XIII, pp. 230–231.
[29]J. Scanlon, *Decline and Fall of the Labour Party* (London, 1932), p. 72.
[30]*Provision of Work* (Cmd. 2196), pp. 4–6. See also Shaw's comments, 176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2572.
[31]*Provision of Work*, pp. 10–11.
[32]*New Leader*, 20 June 1924, p. 5.
[33]*The Socialist's Budget* (London, 1907), p. 56; *If Labour Rules* (London, 1923), pp. 39–40.
[34]*New Leader*, 20 June 1924, p. 9; 169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 760; *Socialist Review*, Aug. 1924, pp. 2–3.
[35]TUC, *Annual Report 1924*, p. 310; *The Times*, 11 July 1924.
[36]*Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1912–24*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1952), pp. 255–6 (12 Dec. 1923).
[37]TUC, *Annual Report 1924*, p. 163 (Cabinet Unemployment Policy Committee's reply to TUC deputation); 170 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2063–6; 174: 677–9.
[38]Ernest Thurtle, *Time's Winged Chariot* (London, 1945), p. 78.

[39]*Outlook*, 29 Dec. 1923, p. 480.
[40]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 761; *The Times*, 19 March, 25 July 1924; Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 595.
[41]See Sir B. Mallet and C. O. George, *British Budgets*, 3rd Series, 1921–2 to 1932–3 (London, 1933), pp. 95ff.
[42]*The Socialist's Budget*, p. 56; ibid., p. 40; *The Big Business Budget* (London, 1923), p. 11; *If Labour Rules*, pp. 34–5 (italics added).
[43]See P. C. Hoffman's report in the *Shop Assistant*, 17 May 1924, p. 400; Snowden's speech in his constituency, *The Times*, 17 May 1924; and Mallet and George, *British Budgets*, pp. 107–8.
[44]*New Leader*, 2 May 1924, p. 2; *Liberal Magazine*, Oct. 1924, pp. 590–1, cites criticisms by W. J. Brown in the Civil Service Clerical Association Journal, *Red Tape*, Sept. 1924.
[45]172 H.C. Deb., 5 s., Index; *Socialist Review*, June 1924, pp. 244–6.
[46]173 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1204–9, 1196; *AEU Journal*, June 1924, p. 32; *Daily Herald* 1 and 13 May 1924. See also *Gleanings and Memoranda*, June 1924, pp. 658–9.
[47]*The Times*, 19 June 1924; *Forward*, 21 Feb. 1925. See also "Seven Members of the Labour Party", *The Labour Party's Aim* (London, 1923), p. 29.
[48]*Forward*, 3 May 1924; *Socialist Review*, May 1924, p. 193; *B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, pp. 25–26 (2 May 1924); *Report of the Annual Conference, 1924*, p. 137.
[49]*New Leader*, 22 Aug. 1924, p. 4; ibid., 28 March, 4 July, and 8 Aug. 1924; ibid., 30 May 1924, p. 9.
[50]See *Socialist Review*, June 1924, p. 244.
[51]*New Leader*, 29 Aug. 1924, p. 3; MacDonald, *Policy for Labour*, p. 156; Snowden, *If Labour Rules*, p. 44.
[52]R. F. Harrod, *Life of John Maynard Keynes* (London, 1951); *Socialist Review*, Sept. 1923, pp. 102 and 108.
[53]*Diaries, 1924–32*, p. 190 (2 Feb. 1929; italics in original).
[54]*Report*, pp. 165–6.
[55]See ILP, *Six Months of Labour Government* (London, 1924), p. 5, and Tom Dickson, M.P., in *Forward*, 9 Aug. 1924.
[56]See Sir Patrick Hastings's election address, *The Times*, 18 Oct. 1924.
[57]*Foreign Policy of the Labour Party* (London, 1923), pp. 30–31.
[58]*The Times*, 25 Aug. 1924; Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 615.
[59]*The Labour Party's Aim*, pp. 72–74.
[60]*18th Abstract of Labour Statistics* (Cmd. 2740), p. 53.
[61]*Diaries, 1924–32*, p. 29 (25 May 1924).
[62]See M. A. Hamilton's comment on his electioneering methods, in *Remembering My Good Friends* (London, 1944), p. 110.

X

THE EUROPEAN PROBLEM
Year of Opportunity

Among the many sins for which the Labour Party was in the habit of criticizing pre-war diplomacy was the comparative lack of Parliamentary control over foreign policy. In 1924, however, this same relative freedom of action in foreign affairs gave the Labour Government its greatest opportunity for accomplishment; the approval of the House of Commons would not be required for Ramsay MacDonald's every move towards securing at last a real peace in Europe.

The Labour Party's war-time split over foreign policy had gradually healed during the five post-war years. The wise decision to leave the Coalition before the peace-making cleared the way for the growth in all sections of the party of a common antipathy to the Versailles Treaty. Even those who held Germany responsible for starting the war managed to reserve some blame for the nefarious practice of secret diplomacy, too.[1] A few such general attitudes usually sufficed as a foreign policy for the great mass of the party. Only on issues of over-riding importance, such as the threat of war with the Soviets in 1920, were the big battalions of the trade unions stirred to an expression of opinion. In more ordinary circumstances interest in foreign affairs was concentrated in that group of Labourites in and around the Union of Democratic Control—many of whom were ex-Liberals. The centre of their Labour Party activities was the ILP; the ILP, in turn, exercised a predominant influence on foreign affairs in the party as a whole.[2]

It was partly because the party's foreign policy was generally left to such a small group to formulate that an impression of great coherence and unity of viewpoint could be conveyed. But an even more important factor was the irresponsibility of Opposition. It was easy to find unity in hatred of Versailles.

The test would come when the party had to develop positive proposals for improving the situation.

The first Labour Government faced three main challenges in foreign affairs. One of these, the task of achieving a normal, functioning relationship with the Soviet Union, is considered separately, in Chapter XI. The other two—the question of reparations and the French occupation of the Ruhr, and the problem of European security—grew out of the central problem of Franco-German relations.

Had the new Government followed previous Labour policy, it would soon have been at the head of a new crusade in Europe, a crusade against France, or at least against Poincaré's policy in the Ruhr. In both Labour and Liberal journals, cursing of "the Napoleon of the Ruhr" was loud, frequent, and uninhibited. The *New Statesman* summed it up: Britain must not "let France trample on Europe in the name of a fly-blown idol called the *Entente Cordiale*".[3] But would not an anti-Poincarist crusade ruin the opportunity that 1924 presented for an amicable settlement of the reparations question? This opportunity had taken a long time to create; its origins lay in a speech by Hughes, the American Secretary of State, shortly before the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr began, proposing an international commission to study the reparations problem and to suggest a solution. Not until the end of German passive resistance on 27 September 1923, and the beginning of French disillusionment with the occupation as a practical policy, was any progress possible. Then, during October, President Coolidge revived the Hughes idea, Stanley Baldwin picked it up, the United States gave qualified approval to Baldwin's suggestion, and finally Poincaré gave it his grudging acceptance, provided that there was no "departure from precedent", that all was done "within the framework of the Treaty", and that there was no change in the amount of German debt as fixed in 1921. There were a few more French hesitations, but on 12 December, while attention in Britain was focused on domestic political developments, the U.S. Government approved the idea of appointing Americans to the committee of inquiry, as private citizens. Accordingly, two committees were

appointed, the first and much the more important being placed under the chairmanship of General Charles G. Dawes, President of the Central Trust Company, Chicago.*

Thus, when the Labour Government came into office, a committee of big businessmen, with a sprinkling of economists, was engaged in the task of determining how much Germany could pay and, in effect, the mechanism by which reparations payments would in the future be made. On 9 April 1924 the reports of the Committees were received by the Reparations Commission; on the 16th, Germany accepted them as the basis for a solution, and on the 25th they were accepted in principle by Britain, France, and Belgium.

The experts had not been asked to consider such political matters as the steps to be taken by the Allies in the event of future German defaults. Nor had they been asked to deliver judgment on the occupation of the Ruhr. Inevitably, however, both questions arose, and the Reports, in fact, contained an implied condemnation of French policy. The experts considered stability of budget and currency to be unattainable in Germany as long as she remained subject to "limitations as to her economic rights over part of her area". They had therefore assumed, as the basis of their whole report, "that the fiscal and economic unity of the Reich will be restored". They further assumed that restrictions upon German economic activity would be removed,

> and that they will not be reimposed except in case of flagrant failure to fulfill the conditions accepted by common agreement. In case of such failure it is plainly for the creditor Governments, *acting with the consciousness of joint trusteeship* . . . then to determine the nature of sanctions to be applied and the method of their rapid and effective application.[4]

Such implied criticism of French policy was, of course, pleasing to Labourites, as indeed to most Liberals and many Conservatives. But far less tasteful to Labour were the proposed

*For these events, see Arnold Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1924* (London, 1926), pp. 340–9. General Dawes later became Vice-President of the U.S.A. (1925–9) and Ambassador to Britain, 1929–32.

arrangements for paying reparations, for they included payments in kind, and the floating of a loan to Germany which, it was feared, might enable foreign financial interests to interfere powerfully in German internal affairs. Above all, although the Plan was a long step in the direction of abolishing the harsh Franco-Belgian methods of extorting reparations, it carried no appeal to those who were opposed to reparations entirely. In fact, in so far as it made the whole system of payment more efficient and realistic, the Plan strengthened a mechanism which the Labour Party was committed to destroy. In view of the party's opposition to reparations as the very core of Versailles iniquity, it may seem surprising that MacDonald devoted himself to the adoption and implementation of the Dawes Report.

Immediately upon assuming office, the Prime Minister wrote a personal letter to the French Premier. Far from attacking "the wrecker of European civilization",[5] he extended the warm hand of friendship:

> I grieve to find so many unsettled points causing us trouble and concern, and I assure you it will be my daily endeavour to help to settle them to our mutual benefit. You have your public opinion and I have mine; you have your national interests to conserve and protect and I have mine. Sometimes at first they may be in conflict, but I am sure, by the strenuous action of good will, these conflicts can be settled and policies devised . . . in hearty co-operation. . . . Thus, the Entente will be much more than a nominal thing, and France and Great Britain can advance together to establish peace and security in Europe.[6]

As MacDonald said later, "My first task was to create a healthier atmosphere; I had to make a gesture, and wait to see if it was responded to."[7] Critics in Britain quickly forgot that the "gesture" had in effect abandoned the crusade against France and given Labour's ratification to the *Entente*. MacDonald's informal approach, waiving the traditional rules of diplomatic correspondence, and the warm reception which the letter enjoyed in France, delighted those who were hoping for

a new era in international relations. Poincaré's answer, though noncommittal, echoed MacDonald's hopes in tones previously unheard from this source.[8]

In the debate on the new Government's policy in the House of Commons, MacDonald pointedly avoided a Tory challenge to show how his policy differed from that of his predecessor, lauded "the instant and hearty co-operation of M. Poincaré", and promised that "France has nothing to fear from any policy that we may pursue".[9]

In a second letter to Poincaré, dated 21 February, MacDonald came closer to grips with the problem. Pointing out that Britain, with her lost trade, and France, with her devastated territory, had different views of post-war recovery, he suggested discussions to follow publication of the Experts' Report. He hoped that by examining the problem "from its widest aspect" they might avoid renewal of "the old wearisome round of controversy and altercation on points that may be important but are not fundamental". Among these non-fundamental points, apparently, were the questions of the Ruhr, the Rhineland and the Palatinate.

Poincaré's reply was again most friendly in tone, but gave no ground: France was motivated solely by fear of German revenge, and had no territorial designs on Germany; the Ruhr occupation would end when Germany paid up. Still, news of the deep impression made in France by MacDonald's "more adroit and friendly methods" continued to come in.[10] His next step was to invite the Belgian Premier and Foreign Minister to Chequers. They were pleased with their talks there; so were the French, and even more so when the British Ambassador proceeded to give Poincaré an account of the Anglo-Belgian talks, and to suggest that he get a fuller story of them from the Belgians. On 9 May, two days before a general election in France, it was announced that MacDonald had invited the French Premier to Chequers ten days hence. There was an outcry that MacDonald was prejudging the French election, but it was in reality a shrewd stroke which flattered Poincaré and could hardly hurt his opponents, the *cartel des gauches*. Virtue was rewarded; Paris was "staggered by the earthquake which has

shaken the very foundation of its belief": Poincaré lost the election, and after some complex manoeuvrings Edouard Herriot, the Radical Socialist leader, became Prime Minister.[11]

The way to agreement was now much easier. On 22–23 June Herriot visited Chequers. On the 24th, a letter from Sir Eyre Crowe, Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, outlined British policy as it then stood. The Dawes Report should be accepted; a German undertaking to take the necessary measures to implement the Plan by a fixed date should be matched by a pledge from the Allies to end the occupation in all its aspects within two weeks of the same date. In future, some authority other than the Reparations Commission should have sole power to declare Germany in default. Disputes involving the agreement should be referred to the International Court.[12]

One more storm ensued, in which MacDonald had to make a sudden visit to Paris to reassure the French that there was no British plot to revise the Versailles Treaty under cover of implementing the Dawes Plan. In the Franco-British Memorandum issued after these further conversations,[13] it appeared that MacDonald had given considerable ground to appease France. There were elaborate reassurances, and ingenious arguments to prove that the Dawes Plan did not involve any alteration of the Versailles Treaty; and instead of a new body to determine when Germany was in default, the Reparations Commission, augmented by an American, was to do so.

In Parliament, Liberals and Conservatives accused MacDonald both of bowing to French demands and deserting his party's past policy of revising Versailles. MacDonald did not really answer the latter charge, but described instead how surprised he had been, on becoming Foreign Secretary, to discover how passionately the French clung to the Treaty as "the Ark of the Covenant". It was a far cry from 1923, when, as his critics reminded him, he had accused France of wanting to crush Germany, not for security's sake, but in order to dominate Europe.[14]

On 16 July, the London Conference met. MacDonald's preliminary work was done. He had shown a flexibility and practicality that would stand him in good stead during the

negotiations to come. He now took the chairmanship of the Conference, and opened it with an adroit appeal to France and Germany. To the latter, the Dawes Plan offered hope of a stable currency and a balanced budget—"the one hope for Germany of climbing out of the financial morass into which she has almost irretrievably sunk". To the French his appeal was implied, but in unmistakable terms. "Has anyone contemplated the lamentable consequences of disagreement [here]?" he asked. "Without unity there can be no security—without security there can be no peace."[15]

Still, it required all MacDonald's tact and talent for compromise to make the Conference a success. He had wisely insisted that the terms of reference be restricted to the implementation of the Dawes Report; to open the details of the Plan to debate and possible amendment would be to risk a return to disagreement and futility. Even the question of the Ruhr occupation was referred to negotiations conducted during the period of the Conference but entirely separate from it. Yet despite these careful preparations there were difficulties aplenty. Indeed at one stage only the fact that all the delegates "without exception, made persistent efforts to reach a definite agreement and to prevent catastrophe" saved the situation.[16] MacDonald's skill as chairman was a crucial element in the eventual success of the Conference.[17] Even from the printed record of the proceedings, his friendliness and informality, his disarming frankness about his own inexperience, stand out. *The Times* (18 August) waxed lyrical about "his easy ways and happy manner"; reports of informal conversations going on in Downing Street, in Whitehall, and even under the Admiralty Arch suggest that MacDonald's approach was contagious.* His substantive treatment of the reparations question may have resembled that of a Conservative Foreign Secretary, but his handling of the Conference could never have come from a Curzon or an Austen Chamberlain.

*Jacques Bardoux, who disapproved of such goings-on, describes "des conciliabules de couloirs, où le passant pénétre et où chacun pérore, dans la fume des pipes et le désordre des idées." *Le Socialisme au Pouvoir* (Paris, 1930), p. 242.

Certainly the Conference achieved a great deal. The Germans came and were dealt with as equals for the first time since the war. The Dawes Plan was accepted and implemented satisfactorily. The negotiations on the Ruhr produced an agreement to evacuate some areas immediately and all areas within twelve months—not what anti-Poincarists had hoped for, but far better than nothing. Above all, as MacDonald said in his concluding speech to the Conference:

> We are now offering [Europe] the first really negotiated agreement since the war; every party here represented is morally bound to do its best to carry it out, because it is not the result of an ultimatum. . . . This agreement may be regarded as the first Peace Treaty, because we sign it with a feeling that we have turned our backs on the terrible years of war and war mentality.[18]

It was the high point of MacDonald's career.

In the Labour Party, however, emotions were mixed. There was great pride in the accomplishment of Labour's first Foreign Secretary. He had exploded the myth that foreign affairs were a secret science, the last mystery of state, which only members of the traditional ruling classes could master. In its elation one ILP journal proclaimed: "Ramsay MacDonald has joined the ranks of the great Prime Ministers of Great Britain."[19] But at the same time a storm of disapproval had blown up over the Dawes Plan. On the eve of the Conference, the uncompromising E. D. Morel led a fierce attack in the House of Commons upon "this last attempt to square the circle, and to make economic truths compatible with the violation of economic truths". George Hardie reproached his leaders bitterly:

> There is a number of us on these Back Benches who are not politicians. That is to say we are not of this opinion to-day and of another opinion tomorrow. We have always believed in the policy of no annexations and no indemnities and in working for a peaceful settlement. We still hold to these opinions and if a Vote is taken tonight we shall have the greatest possible pleasure in voting against the Government.

Morel, in the *New Leader*, quoted Austen Chamberlain's statement that the Labour Government had " 'established the authority of the Versailles Treaty not again to be questioned by any British Government' "; that this could be said without fear of question or denial was enough, Morel thought, "to spread the dry rot of suspicion and disillusion" in the ranks of Labour.[20]

Together with this revolt on grounds of principle went attacks on the practical effects of the Dawes scheme, especially on the issue of payments in kind. "The problem for us," said Tom Johnston, "is not Germany's capacity to pay, but our capacity to receive." Rumblings were heard from the trade unions. The Dawes Plan would lead to a lowering of German wages, which would in turn increase the pressure upon British workers' standards, said the General Secretary of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers. As the opening of the TUC drew near, the air was thick with reports of the MFGB's anger against the Government concerning the proposed reparations payments in coal.[21]

The TUC represented the high-water mark of attacks on the Plan. A. A. Purcell, in his Presidential Address, strongly condemned it for placing the burden of reparations on the German working classes, and causing the denationalization of the German railways. J. Marchbank, of the NUR, called it a settlement "for the benefit of international capitalists". The Congress did turn down a Communist attempt to open the agenda to broader attacks on the Government, after the respected miners' leader Robert Smillie had assured the delegates that the Parliamentary Labour Party Executive had done all that was possible to press the Labour viewpoint on the Government at the time of the Dawes negotiations. But later a resolution against the Dawes Plan passed by a large majority, with no front rank figure rising to defend either the Plan or the Prime Minister.[22]

From all this, it might seem that MacDonald had flown too directly in the face of his party's established policy on reparations. But the party was changing its attitude, too, although naturally more slowly than the Government. As early as May, the UDC Executive had resolved to urge acceptance of the Dawes Plan upon France and Germany, all in demanding that

Britain renounce her share in reparations forthwith. Even Morel left the door open a crack: acceptance of the Plan could be justified if it put "an end to the state of latent war which has existed in Europe for five years", and if Britain remained free to adopt her own policy concerning the payments due her. In late July, the *New Leader* discussed the growing antipathy to reparations on the part of Right-wing business interests in Britain, who feared that restoring Germany's ability to pay would mean the recovery of Britain's great competitor. Labour, the paper thought, should take heart at this, for was not German recovery one of its aims? Later in the autumn the same journal defended the Dawes Plan in detail, and published an interview with Emanuel Shinwell, the Secretary for Mines, who marshalled figures to show that the Plan would not greatly affect British coal exports.[23]

But the strongest argument of all was the realization that to scrap the Dawes Plan would mean a return to the *status quo* of 1923, unless, as Tom Johnston pointed out in *Forward*, Britain "went to war and shoved the French out [of the Ruhr] at the point of a bayonet". When these alternatives were faced, real opposition collapsed, even if grumbling persisted. By the time the Party Conference was impending, even the miners were reported as wavering in their determination to challenge the Prime Minister on the issue. The Government had gone out of its way to appease the trade unions by appointing a committee to act as watch-dog over any threats to British commercial interests arising from the post-Dawes Plan situation. When the Conference met, Herbert Smith of the MFGB said that the miners supported the Dawes Plan, not because they believed in reparations, "but because they realized that Mac and his friends had to do what miners generally had to do when they started a new place, to 'huvver it out'."[24]

This was partly a matter of closing ranks for the general election, then imminent. But many Labourites now recognized that there was no point in trying to achieve a solution against the French unless it had first been proven impossible to get one with their co-operation. What would have resulted had MacDonald been less conciliatory, and more faithful to his party's

previous attitude, can easily be deduced from the immediate and violent reaction in France to two minor episodes which came on the heels of the Conference in August. MacDonald, under pressure from his own Cabinet, wrote to the French and Belgian Premiers, reiterating Britain's view that the Ruhr occupation was illegal from the start, and urging that the Governments concerned do everything possible to hasten the evacuation under the new agreement.[25] French anger at this, however, soon gave way to fury at Philip Snowden, who with characteristic frankness and contempt for traditional standards of Ministerial behaviour, gave an interview to the *Manchester Guardian* in which he not only criticized two provisions of the agreement which he had just helped negotiate but undertook to praise the German delegation and attack the French most outspokenly.[26] Had this sort of thing been the rule instead of the exception, the reparations policy of the Labour Government of 1924 would have approximated far more closely that of the Labour Party of 1923, but there is little doubt that it would also have remained entirely barren of achievement.

MacDonald saw agreement on reparations as but a preliminary step to the achievement of European security. Here again, Labour policy underwent some changes in the course of the year 1924.

Some observers feared, when the new Government took office, that it would take its orders from the headquarters of the Second International; others, that the League of Nations would dominate British foreign policy. Those of the new Ministers who held positions in the International immediately reassured the public by resigning them.[27] As for the relation of the Government to the League, there was less change than expected. Early rumours that MacDonald planned to enlarge the section of the Foreign Office dealing with League affairs, from the existing two officials and a typist to something approaching the Quai d'Orsay's twenty-seven officials plus staff, came to nothing. Lord Parmoor, who, as Lord President of the Council, was to work on League affairs and handle foreign relations in the Lords when he was not at Geneva, occupied much the same position as had Lord Robert Cecil before him. The only change

was that Parmoor was assigned a room, a very small room, at the Foreign Office, whereas poor Cecil had been kept in the outer darkness of the Treasury. From this vantage point, Parmoor and his young assistant, Philip Noel-Baker, could observe at close range the antagonism between the old Foreign Office spirit and the new internationalism of Geneva.[28]

Parmoor felt that he was regarded "as a cuckoo in the nest" at the Foreign Office; not so his chief, the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who was warmly welcomed as a courteous replacement for the autocratic and temperamental Curzon.[29] MacDonald had recently warned that "until the League has obtained the confidence of all the important nations, we must not become the mere catspaws of the League's devotees, and do nothing except through the League".[30] In office, he caused some stir by refusing the League of Nations' Union's customary offer of its Honorary Presidency.* He shared with most of the party's influential spokesmen on foreign affairs a deep distrust of any collective security based on military force. In disarmament lay the one real guarantee of security; with disarmament, League sanctions would be unnecessary; without it, they would be ineffectual. To many Labourites, French enthusiasm for the League was sufficient to damn it as a cleverly devised tool for maintaining the *status quo* and suppressing Germany.[31] A few on the Left took the Soviet view of the League as an unholy alliance in defence of capitalism; in all sections, stress was put on the lack of universality in a League that excluded Germany, the Soviet Union and the United States. Still, the League remained the logical starting point for any efforts towards security; besides, most Labourites wanted to enlarge and reform it, not to destroy it.

For some time after the Government took office there was no clear indication of the direction in which it would seek a solution to the security problem. On 1 April, steps were taken to remove one evil which Labourites had often blamed for the

*He pleaded inability to attend meetings and be responsible for policy. According to Mr. Noel-Baker (interview with the author, 7 Apr. 1952), he was piqued because he had been left off the Union's Executive in 1918, owing to his political unpopularity at the time.

coming of the war, secret treaties. Arthur Ponsonby (later Lord Ponsonby), MacDonald's Under Secretary, announced that henceforth any treaty, including "agreements, commitments, and understandings by which the Nation may be bound in certain circumstances", would lie on the Table in both Houses of Parliament for twenty-one days after signature, during which time any party could obtain a discussion of it by applying through the usual channels.[32]

This reform aside, the Government confined itself in the early months to general statements on security. Eventual disarmament (there was no sign of over-optimism on this point); enlargement of the League, not in order to provide bigger collective security forces but to lend moral weight to its judgments of right and wrong—such was the Government's policy, as outlined by the Prime Minister in February.[33] And between this rather orthodox Labour position, and something closer to the French idea of guarantees backed by forcible sanctions, the Ministry seemed for a time to waver. Towards the end of February, Arthur Henderson, the Home Secretary, fighting a by-election at Burnley, made a speech calling for a revision of the Versailles Treaty, in so many words. A few months earlier this would have caused no stir, coming from a Labour platform.* But now the result was an explosion of eager efforts to embarrass the Government by demanding to know if this was Cabinet policy. The Government was thus prevented from slipping out of the revisionist position quietly and without notice, as no doubt it would have liked to do, and forced to abandon this established canon of Labour foreign policy more or less openly,[34] or lose the benefits of all MacDonald's cautious wooing of Poincaré.

MacDonald's letter of 21 February to the French Premier seemed to suggest a considerable modification of the traditional Labour view. "It may well be that some later decade may see the coming of universal disarmament and universal arbitration,"

*It was, in fact, an old speech, written for the 1922 election, and sent to Henderson in an emergency because he had run out of speeches. A. Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left* (London, 1942), p. 161; *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1924–32* (London, 1956), p. 11 (29 Feb. 1924).

he said. "Our task meanwhile must be to establish confidence." As a possible step towards this he suggested "the creation between certain states of bands of neutralized territory under mutual, or even collective, guarantee and supervision".[35] Yet within a few weeks, the Prime Minister was back at the old position, arguing against attempts to give France security by military guarantee. His words deserve extensive quotation, as they not only foreshadow later policy, but also provide a classic sample of MacDonald's style of speaking at its least felicitous; France knew, he said,

> that a guarantee cannot be a guarantee of a separate pact with only one nation or two nations, but it must change its nature and become a guarantee of some co-operative organisation of the wide scope and amplitude and moral authority of the League of Nations; that so soon as you aim at a guarantee by a body like the League of Nations you minimise and subordinate the military value of the pact and raise to a really effective standard the moral guarantees that flow from conciliation, arbitration, impartial and judicial judgment exercised by the body with which you are associated. The whole orientation of your thought, the whole outlook of your policy, the whole direction from which you get your aim changes when your mind goes away from an Anglo-American-French pact and turns to an agreement with a League of Nations equipped, not with arms, but with all the machinery for exposing right and wrong and for explaining how things arise.*

In late April, MacDonald raised a storm of French protests by a speech at the ILP Annual Conference, stressing the need to trust the Germans and deriding the "stupid idea of military security". This he apparently stilled, with an ease which seems incomprehensible, by making another speech, in which he yielded nothing to the proponents of forcible sanctions but managed to placate his French critics by saying that he, too,

*171 H.C. Deb., 5s., 1603. It was this that moved Lloyd George to a harsh attack on MacDonald, ending: "The French are entitled to know what we mean. The British people are entitled to know what we mean, and I should not be a bit surprised if the Prime Minister would like to know himself what we mean." (ibid., 1618).

was for security, the only difference being in the "angle from which we look upon these things".[36]

The first really decisive move in this field came on 5 July, with MacDonald's note rejecting the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance. The Draft Treaty was the first important effort to arrive at a formula for European security after the breakdown of the negotiations for an Anglo-French guarantee treaty in July 1922.[37] Drawn up by Lord Cecil and Colonel Requin, it joined the ideas of collective security and disarmament in one document. Aggressive war it called "an international crime", and identified types of non-aggressive war. Help to victims of aggression was to be provided, with the League Council deciding who such victims were, whether they were entitled to aid, and if so of what kind. Disarmament, described as proportionate to the amount of security obtained under the Treaty, was to take place within two years, and the Council was to have powers to investigate the carrying out of this engagement. Provisions were included, out of deference to French wishes, for special security arrangements involving groups of powers. No nation was to be responsible for aiding victims of aggression outside its own continent.

The Draft Treaty met with a somewhat mixed reception generally, but what killed it was the British rejection. MacDonald's note advanced a variety of objections.[38] The difficulty of reconciling the proposed Continental obligations with the responsibilities of Empire was stressed, and similar criticism from Canada quoted. Several practical difficulties were envisaged: the Council would not achieve the needed unanimity for decision "on a really controversial issue"; there was no adequate definition of agression; the aid to a victim would only come after long delay. The Treaty represented an "undesirable extension of the functions of the Council . . . a most inappropriate body to be entrusted with the control of military forces in operation against any particular State or States". At the same time, since measures for carrying out the general guarantee were made dependent on the explicit consent of each State at the time, the guarantee became "so precarious that no responsible Government will feel justified in consenting to any

material reduction in armaments in return". In fact, to carry out her obligations under the Treaty, Britain would have to increase her naval armaments. The provision for partial alliances within the general Treaty was severely criticized as leading to a re-emergence of the old alliance system. On a more general level, objection was made to "the immense complication of international relations which it [the Treaty] would create, the uncertainty of the practical effect of its clauses, and the consequent difficulty of conducting national policy".

After lodging so many formidable objections to the Draft Treaty, the note ended by proposing a conference, to include non-League powers, to produce "a scheme or schemes for the reduction of armaments", and added, rather surprisingly, that His Majesty's Government "desire to make it clear that there is no intention to prejudge in any way the further consideration of the proposed treaty by the conference". Finally, the possibility was again held out of setting up demilitarized zones between States, "safeguarding special frontiers under some form of international control, granting further powers to the International Court, and so on".

Thus the note raised almost as many questions as it answered. After making so many objections to the Draft Treaty, and "finding themselves unable to support it", how could the Government claim not to have prejudged its further consideration? Was the Government objecting on familiar Labour grounds, or on the National and imperial grounds which led many Tories to oppose the Draft? Were not many of the specific doubts about the workability of the Treaty equally applicable to any collective security measures, even the more limited ones tentatively suggested towards the end of the note?

To one question the note did seem to give a conclusive answer: the Government was not favourable to an attempt to achieve security through blocking the gaps in the Covenant with effective provision for sanctions against aggression. If the Government had not gone quite as far as the Soviets had in repudiating "all schemes involving a universal organization and compulsory measures directed by such an organization

against individual states", it did seem to have repudiated any such system based upon the far from universal League of Nations.[39]

Naturally, all of this brought no pleasure either to the French or to League enthusiasts. French concern was reflected in the Franco-British Memorandum of 9 July, which included assurances that the two Governments had "proceeded to a preliminary exchange of views on the question of security", and would pursue the matter further. In London, 124 M.P.s of all parties, members of the League of Nations Parliamentary Committee, expressed their anxiety to the Government lest its note, "however unintentionally, create the impression that Great Britain does not accept the principle of the interdependence of disarmament and security, and that Great Britain wishes to withdraw from the League of Nations the function of dealing with the problem of disarmament".[40]

The time to correct that impression, they concluded, would be at the next meeting of the League Assembly, early in September. MacDonald and Herriot had agreed, back in June, to attend this session in person—the first time that the Premier of a major power had visited the League. Now the successful conclusion of the Reparations Conference set the stage for a fresh attack upon the security problem. MacDonald's speech at the opening of the Assembly was eagerly awaited. "It is pathetic to see how they are hailing MacDonald as the Superman who is to get Europe out of the mess," wrote Mrs. H. M. Swanwick, a British substitute delegate.[41] His speech proposed four main steps: immediate entry of Germany into the League; examination of the Optional Clause in the Statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice, with a view to general ratification; elaboration of a much wider system of arbitration; convocation by the League, after suitable preparation, of a World Disarmament Conference.[42] All of these points had been foreshadowed, either in established Labour policy, or in MacDonald's letters to Poincaré and public statements. Mrs. Swanwick had noted beforehand that MacDonald would have no treaties of guarantee; in the speech he went out of his way to attack paper pacts, suggesting that judgment as to who was

the aggressor in an international crisis was likely to take fifty years to make correctly.

The French press reacted violently to this. *The Times* thought it contained "one or two things that may possibly acquire significance", but little more. The reaction in the Labour movement was jubilant; at the TUC a speaker drew cheers when he proclaimed that the doubters in the movement could now see that "so long as MacDonald is Prime Minister of this country he will stand up for the ideals he suffered for in the last war".[43]

It was Herriot's turn next. He quoted Pascal: "Right without might is powerless; might without right is tyranny." Three times in his speech he stressed the inseparability of arbitration, security, and disarmament. Picking up a proposal from a group of American experts (the Shotwell Committee), he suggested that an aggressor be defined as "the party to a dispute who refuses to submit to arbitration". A bit later, Benes of Czechoslovakia tried to link the French and British views by arguing that effective sanctions, far from being incompatible with the kind of arbitration desired by MacDonald, were "a necessary condition" and "an inevitable consequence" of it. When the speeches were over, a joint Anglo-French resolution directed two committees to consider "the obligations contained in the Covenant of the League in relation to the guarantees of security which a resort to arbitration and a reduction of armaments may require"; "the articles in the Covenant relating to the settlement of disputes", with a view to their amendment; and the Optional Clause in the Permanent Court's Statute, to see how it "might be rendered more precise and thereby facilitate the more general acceptance of the clause". Out of these committee deliberations came, on 1 October, one week before the defeat in the House of Commons of the first Labour Government, the "Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes"—more familiarly, the Geneva Protocol.[44]

The Protocol, it will readily be seen, was not taken to Geneva with MacDonald. Nor was it essentially a British proposal, much less a MacDonald proposal. It was worked out in com-

mittee, with Arthur Henderson and Lord Parmoor, the British delegates, taking prominent parts, but with Benes and the Greek, Politis, *rapporteurs* of the two Committees, making the greatest contributions.

As to content, the document owed something to British influence, certainly, and indeed something to the influence of the Labour Party. Many of the things for which Henderson worked at Geneva, however, would have been objects of any British statesman guarding British national interests. For instance, Britain sponsored a clause in Article 3 under which States could make any reservations they liked upon adhering to the jurisdiction of the Permanent Court; this was to safeguard Britain against ever having to accept non-Anglo-Saxon interpretations of the laws of war at sea. The Labour influence is more clearly discernable in the British insistence that the League Council could legitimately authorize a party to a dispute to go to war to enforce a decision given in its favour only if the other party's failure to accept that decision were accompanied by war in the first place.[45] But this anxiety lest sanctions should themselves become provocations, though most marked in the Labour Party, was widespread elsewhere, too.

When all was said and done, the Protocol was a compromise between the British desire to create the conditions of peace by outlawing war in general and setting up alternative means of settling differences among nations, and the French desire to set up an iron-clad system of sanctions which would come into effect as nearly automatically as possible in the event of a German attempt at revenge for 1918. It differed from the Draft Treaty in several ways, notably by the development of a much fuller system of conciliation and arbitration, by the absence of provision for partial alliances, and by removal of the provision restricting a nation's responsibility to its own continent. But the central idea, collective security with effective sanctions as the prerequisite to disarmament, remained the same.*

The alterations were sufficient to gain a far more enthusiastic

*Sir Norman Angell, *After All* (London, 1951), p. 243, rightly calls the Protocol "every bit as committal and entangling as Cecil's Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance".

reception for the Protocol than the Draft Treaty had enjoyed. France signed and ratified it on the spot; the Assembly recommended it unanimously to the Governments of the world. Once again, and more plainly than ever, the main obstacle proved to be Britain and the Dominions. During October and November, Dominion criticisms piled up. When the League Council met in December, Austen Chamberlain, the new Foreign Secretary, got the question put off until March. In March, Great Britain announced that she would neither sign the Protocol nor recommend signature to other members of the Empire.

It is often assumed that the Labour Government would have ratified the Protocol, had it survived in office.[46] Parmoor was instructed by MacDonald not to sign at Geneva, but he announced on behalf of the delegation that it was "prepared unhesitatingly, and with all the influence at its command, to recommend [acceptance of the Protocol] to the British Government". Much later, he wrote that ratification "would have been obtained without difficulty".[47] Henderson, who carried much weight in the Labour movement, was undoubtedly a convinced advocate of the Protocol.[48] MacDonald's Election Address in October said: "As a result [of the Geneva negotiations] Parliament will be asked, as soon as possible after the election, to agree to an arrangement which will enlist the world in the prevention of war and the limitation of armaments". At Bristol, during the campaign, he said: "The Geneva decisions had not yet been settled. He was perfectly certain that, if any other Government excepting the Labour Government came in, there would be no hope that the Conference at Geneva would be fulfilled. If we tore up that Geneva Protocol we should lose credit in the eyes of the world." And after the rejection of the Protocol by the Tory Government, MacDonald wrote an article, comparing the Protocol favourably to pacts of guarantee, and attacking the outright rejection of the document.[49]

None of this evidence is conclusive, however. At no time did the Labour Government pronounce in favour of the Protocol, and its former leaders were very careful, after its downfall, not

to say flatly that it would have done so, even when taunted by their opponents with their reticence. The assertions of such an ardent advocate as Parmoor, expressed long after the event, while undoubtedly sincere, are subject to question. MacDonald's campaign statements, even if they are not dismissible as electioneering, are somewhat equivocal. In his *Protocol or Pact?*, he remains unconverted on the matter of sanctions; they were put into the Protocol, he suggests, because other powers would not accept it without them. "I have never regarded these powers as being of any importance," he says, "except in so far as their presence on paper is a harmless drug to soothe nerves."[50] (In the Draft Treaty, this drug had not been considered harmless.) Once the machinery in the Protocol has worked once or twice, he continues, nations will use it out of habit, and under moral compunction. Certainly, in so far as MacDonald accepted the Protocol at all, he did so in the hope that practice in arbitration, and perhaps the promised Disarmament Conference, would prove beneficial, while the sanctions privisions might, hopefully, remain a dead letter. But his speech in the Protocol debate of 1925 in Parliament wobbled badly, in marked contrast to Henderson's. The ex-Premier's only real enthusiasm was bestowed on some comments of Austen Chamberlain's about the dangers of applying logic to politics. Beyond that, he said: "I know that there are serious problems in this Protocol, but I maintain that it is a splendid foundation for consideration, and for negotiation for change. . . . There will be no security except along those lines. Not in those words, and not in those clauses, but on those lines."[51]

Against Henderson's and Parmoor's enthusiasm, and MacDonald's lukewarm advocacy, must be set the convinced opposition of some others in the Cabinet. As early as August, Haldane expressed misgivings about MacDonald's Geneva policy: he doubted that the defence implications had been adequately weighed; the Committee of Imperial Defence had not been consulted, and "the sailors in particular are uneasy".[52] In 1927, a memorandum written by Haldane during his 1924 tenure of office was made public; in it he criticized signing the Optional Clause, a step included in Article 3 of the Protocol.[53]

Snowden is cited, again in 1927, as opposed to the Protocol; Ponsonby, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, was against it,[54] as was Colonel Wedgwood. In his *Memoirs* the doughty Wedgwood explains that "Arthur Henderson nearly, *but not quite*, converted the Cabinet to the Protocol".[55] At the very least, it must be concluded that the Cabinet was divided on the matter.

Outside the Government, those Labourites most interested in foreign affairs were divided, too. Brailsford, of the *New Leader*, typifies those who came around, a bit reluctantly, to support of the Protocol. In June, Herriot had suggested a security pact, with forcible sanctions; the *New Leader*'s comments are revealing:

> There is no security save in justice; true, but may not the banishment of fear be the first condition for realising justice? Terrified men are never just. A pacifist opposition, which refused to compromise, might, in unconscious alliance with an insular, self-regarding opposition, defeat this Pact. The result would not be the triumph of pacifist ideas in Europe. It would be in France the humiliation of the Left, and the return of militarism to the helm. It would be in Germany the irresistible growth of Nationalism. Some tangible security men will have, illusion though it be. Deny them a League which can protect them, and they will run for security to old-world alliances.[56]

By the time the Protocol appeared, Brailsford was ready to hail it as "the biggest and happiest thing which has happened in the world since the Peace was marred at Versailles", all in fearing that the "mechanism . . . may not be as active in redressing wrong, as it is stern in repressing war", and wondering whether reactionary interests might not turn it into a weapon against the Soviets. If Russia joined in the proposed Disarmament Conference the following year, he concluded, Labour could support the Protocol with no further hesitation.[57]

Others found it more difficult to forget what MacDonald, in rejecting the Draft Treaty, had called "the defects inherent in any general treaty of mutual assistance". For such a treaty the Protocol remained, whatever might be said of its more detailed provisions for peaceful settlement of disputes. Noel-Baker was

described as the sole defender of the Draft Treaty, at the ILP Summer School in late August, a gathering of those in the forefront of Labour Party opinion on foreign affairs.[58] Some of these ILPers may have followed Brailsford; there is no reason to doubt that many, like Mrs. Swanwick, merely became "more and more depressed" over the reliance on sanctions as the Protocol developed.[59] At the meeting of the Second International in January 1925, the British delegation opposed a French move to support the Protocol at once, arguing that since the British Conservative Government would probably not ratify it without proposing changes, the socialist movement should likewise "take the opportunity to propose changes which would complete the splendid work represented by the Protocol".[60] The Labour Party's Advisory Committee on International Questions was at work, in early 1925, on amendments to the Protocol which would, *inter alia*, have weakened the sanctions provisions.[61]

In sum, acceptance of the Protocol required a revolution in Labour thinking on the security question, and this revolution was not completed, either in the Cabinet or in the party at large, by the time the Government fell. Many remained unwilling, in words used earlier by Mrs. Swanwick, to "make the tremendous admission that Security, and therefore Disarmament, depends upon the organization of force".[62] Yet, for the Government to have ratified the Protocol, it would have had to face not only these critics from within, but the opposition of the Committee of Imperial Defence, of the Dominions, and of the United States. The C.I.D. feared "an unlimited claim" upon the Empire's resources, and thought that the Protocol's complex machinery gave the advantage to "an unscrupulous aggressor".[63] The Dominions, without exception, launched objections to the Protocol,[64] and MacDonald, ever concerned to maintain constitutional etiquette, was careful to point out that the Labour Government would have consulted them had it survived in office.[65] Even Lord Parmoor did not argue that Dominion views should be ignored,* but only that "there is a large body

*Earlier he stressed Dominion objections to the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, in defending its rejection by the Government. *Annual Register, 1924*, p. 84.

of responsible opinion in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand . . . in favour of ratification of the principle of the Protocol".[66] The coolness of the United States towards the proposal helped determine the Conservative Government's stand in 1925; it cannot be imagined that MacDonald would have brushed this aside, either.*

Is it likely that a Cabinet already divided on the issue, and lacking a majority in Parliament, could have mustered the strength to overcome all these obstacles to ratification of the Protocol? Perhaps pride of part-authorship would have kept the Labour Government from immediate and outright rejection of it, but it is hard to see how they could have accepted it without serious, possibly crippling, amendments.

Whatever its final attitude towards the Protocol would have been, it is clear that the MacDonald Government found it necessary to depart from previous Labour policy on both the reparations and security issues. There will always be great differences, of course, between blueprints for a policy and a policy in action; but it can scarcely be argued that the Government's behaviour regarding reparations and security owed much to Labour's pre-1924 policies. In each case, the Government felt its way, yielding at least as much ground to its diplomatic adversaries as it extracted from them. Moreover when it refused to yield, the point at issue was more often one on which considerations of National interest were at stake than one in which the principles of pre-1924 Labour foreign policy were endangered—as one would expect of a responsible Government. Britain's right to run her navy in her own way was zealously safeguarded; Labour's antipathy to reparations was not allowed to stand in the way of compromise.

At the same time it would be misleading to suggest that the Labour policy turned out to be nothing but Tory policy administered by different persons. Labour brought to the Foreign

*Gwendolen Carter, who feels that more discussion "and some encouragement from the British Government might well have brought the Dominions to accept it [the Protocol] with only minor amendments", considers it likely that it was the United States stand "which confirmed the British Government's opposition to the Protocol". *The British Commonwealth and International Security* (Toronto, 1947), pp. 121–3.

Office not only a chief infinitely more diplomatic, in the everyday sense of the word, than Lord Curzon, but a willingness to start afresh which found practical expression in such new departures as MacDonald's direct and informal approach to Poincaré. The results were not perfect; the Geneva Protocol is to be found in the honourable company of lost causes and historical might-have-beens. But the Locarno era, that brief interlude of harmony between the wars, owed much to MacDonald's back-breaking work in 1924.[67]

Finally, the first Labour Government should not be blamed too severely if it hesitated before committing Britain to full collective security against aggression, under the Geneva Protocol. It was not aggression after the style of Hitler, after all, about which Ministers were concerned in 1924. Their aim was to prevent the recurrence of a drift into war through two great evils, as they saw them: the international anarchy, which provided no peaceful means for settling disputes, and secret diplomacy, which removed foreign policy from democratic control. Towards this goal, they could reasonably argue that they had made startling progress during their brief period of control over British policy.

NOTES

[1]E.g. J. H. Thomas, *When Labour Rules* (London, 1920), esp. pp. 114–15, 193.
[2]J. Bardoux, *Le Socialisme au Pouvoir* (Paris, 1930), pp. 66–67; W. P. Maddox, *Foreign Relations in British Labour Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), pp. 116–17, 202–4.
[3]*New Statesman*, 22 Dec. 1923, p. 326.
[4]*Report of the Expert Committees appointed by the Reparations Commission* (Cmd. 2105; 1924), pp. 13–14. Italics added.
[5]*New Statesman*, 22 Dec. 1923, p. 325.
[6]Letter of 26 Jan. 1924, text in *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1924.
[7]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 771 (12 Feb. 1924).
[8]Text in *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1924.
[9]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 767–74, esp. 771.
[10]*The Times*, 3 Mar. 1924; see ibid. for texts of this second exchange of letters.
[11]Arnold Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1924* (London, 1926), pp. 362–3; *The Times*, 13 May 1924.

[12]*Correspondence concerning the Conference . . . proposed . . . in London on July 16, 1924* (Cmd. 2184; 1924).
[13]Publ. as Cmd. 2191, 1924.
[14]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 65–66, 71, 79, and 89–90.
[15]*Proceedings of the London Reparation Conference* (Cmd. 2270; 1924), pp. 8–9.
[16]*The Times*, 23 July 1924.
[17]See R. B. Mowat, *History of European Diplomacy, 1914–25* (London, 1927), p. 278; *An Ambassador of Peace: Pages from the Diary of Viscount D'Abernon*, III (London, 1930), 90, 98–99.
[18]*Proceedings* (Cmd. 2270), p. 95.
[19]*Socialist Review*, Oct. 1924, p. 98.
[20]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 133–44, 170–2; *New Leader*, 25 July 1924, p. 5. For Chamberlain speech, see 176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 108 (14 July 1924).
[21]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 102; *Daily Herald*, 25 Aug. 1924; *Daily News*, 27 Aug. 1924; *The Times*, 29 Aug. 1924.
[22]TUC, *Report, 1924*, pp. 69–70, 74, 289–90, and 542–6.
[23]H. M. Swanwick, *Builders of Peace* (London, 1924), pp. 171–2; 176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 142; *New Leader*, 25 July and 3 Oct. 1924.
[24]*Forward*, 23 Aug. 1924; *The Times*, 3 Oct. 1924; ibid., 25 Aug. 1924; TUC, *Report, 1924*, p. 114.
[25]*The Times*, 19 Aug. 1924.
[26]*Manchester Guardian*, 19 Aug. 1924; *The Times*, 21 Aug. 1924.
[27]See Bardoux, *Socialisme au Pouvoir*, p. 72.
[28]Lord Parmoor, *A Retrospect* (London, 1936), pp. 196–7.
[29]D'Abernon, *Diary*, III, 30–31, 55; Haldane, quoted in Sir Frederick Maurice, *Life of Viscount Haldane*, Vol. II, *Haldane, 1915–28* (London, 1939), p. 152.
[30]MacDonald, *Foreign Policy for the Labour Party* (London, 1923), p. 21.
[31]See report of ILP Summer School, *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Aug. 1924.
[32]171 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2003–5.
[33]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 772–3.
[34]See 170 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 607–9.
[35]Text in *The Times*, 3 Mar. 1924.
[36]*The Times*, 21 and 29 Apr. 1924.
[37]For narrative of these developments, see Toynbee, *Survey . . . 1924*, pp. 6–28.
[38]The British note is published with the Treaty text in *Correspondence between H.M. Government and the League of Nations* (Cmd. 2200; 1924).
[39]Soviet note to the League, publ. in *Izvestia*, 23 Mar. 1924, and in *The Times*, 1 Apr. 1924. For MacDonald's antipathy to the Draft

Treaty, see Sir Norman Angell, *After All* (London, 1951), pp. 240–2.

[40]*The Times*, 7 Aug. 1924.

[41]H. M. Swanwick, *I Have Been Young* (London, 1935), p. 388.

[42]For text of the speech, see *The Times*, 5 Sept. 1924.

[43]*The Times*, 5–6 Sept. 1924; TUC *Report, 1924*, p. 430.

[44]See P. J. Noel-Baker, *The Geneva Protocol* (London, 1925), pp. 18–19; Toynbee, *Survey . . 1924*, pp. 43, 45–46. Text of Protocol publ. in Cmd. 2273, 1924.

[45]Noel-Baker, *Geneva Protocol*, pp. 67–70 and 55–56.

[46]See, e.g. Elaine Windrich, *British Labour's Foreign Policy* (Stanford, Calif., 1952), p. 41; C. L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* (Chicago, 1955), p. 181; and, by implication, Sir Harold Nicolson, *King George V* (London, 1952), p. 394. Among the few to doubt this is C. E. Sipple, *British Foreign Policy since the World War* (Iowa City, 1932), p. 86.

[47]Parmoor, *A Retrospect*, p. 253.

[48]See his speeches at Burnley, *The Times*, 13 Oct. 1924, and in Parliament, 182 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 291–307 (24 Mar. 1925).

[49]*The Times*, 18, 22 Oct. 1924; *Labour Magazine*, Apr. 1925, pp. 531–4, publ. as pamphlet, *Protocol or Pact? The Alternative to War.*

[50]*Protocol or Pact?*, p. 5.

[51]182 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 338–47.

[52]Quoted in Maurice, *Haldane*, II, 167.

[53]ibid., 219–26.

[54]*The Times*, 5 Oct. 1927; Rt. Hon. P. J. Noel-Baker, interviewed by the author, 7 Apr. 1952.

[55]Wedgwood, *Memoirs of a Fighting Life* (London, 1940), p. 184.

[56]*New Leader*, 27 June 1924, p. 2.

[57]ibid., 10 Oct. 1924, p. 8.

[58]See *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Aug. 1924.

[59]H.M. Swanwick, *I Have Been Young*, p. 401.

[60]*New Leader*, 16 Jan. 1925, p. 7.

[61]Henry R. Winkler, "The Emergence of a Labor Foreign Policy in Great Britain, 1918–1929", *Jour. of Mod. Hist.*, XXVIII (1956), 257.

[62]Letter to *New Leader*, 4 July 1924, p. 6.

[63]Objections reported in *The Times*, 18 Feb. 1925.

[64]See C. A. Macartney *et al*, *Survey of International Affairs, 1925* (London, 1928), II, 5–6, and Gwendolen Carter, *British Commonwealth and International Security: the Role of the Dominions 1919–39* (Toronto, 1947), pp. 114–22.

[65]179 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 64–65.

[66]*Lords Debates, 1924–25*, LX, 363–4 (3 Mar. 1925).

[67]See Nicolson's tribute, *King George V*, p. 393.

XI

RUSSIA
Path of Most Resistance

The pacification of Europe, to be complete, would have to include a resumption of normal relations with the Soviet Union; of this Labour people were convinced in 1924. There were perhaps few in the party who retained the rapturous enthusiasm of 1918–20, typified by George Lansbury's account of his trip to Russia: "[I] finally found myself . . . cheering the Red Flag in the midst of soldiers, not one of whom understood a word we were saying. However, it was a great joy for me to feel myself in a Socialist country, even though the masses were starving."[1] The TUC's flirtation with the Soviets, which reached a climax with the delegates cheering the future purge victim, Tomsky, at Scarborough in 1925, owed something, at least, to the onslaughts of Tories and Liberals upon the Labour Government's Russian policy in 1924. It often happened that the attempts of anti-Soviet politicians and newspapers to portray the Labour Party as a nest of uncritical Russophiles caused Labourites to defend the Soviets more energetically than they might otherwise have done. There was also an illusion of solidarity from the fact that the Soviets, like the Labour Party, had stood for a peace without indemnities or annexations. Yet recognition of the Communists' totalitarian tendencies became more and more widespread in the Labour movement, and the party moved steadily, from 1920, towards barring the British Communists from taking part in its activities. It also took a leading part in reviving the Second International, in opposition to the Leninist Third. Within the world of socialism, the British Labour Party fought the Communists; in the broader world of international affairs, Labour argued for the restoration of Russia to the European family, tended to discount unfavourable reports on Soviet affairs as anti-socialist propaganda, and

urged that allowances be made for the difference between the task of a Russian government and that of a stable, democratically chosen British government. Ramsay MacDonald, as consistent as any Conservative in his opposition to the Soviet dictatorship and "the queer non-moral mentality of the Communist", nevertheless condemned "the wild whirl of forgery, of ignorance, of fake which has been nine-tenths of the anti-Bolshevist propaganda in both Great Britain and America", and warned lest continued ostracism of Russia lead to a hostile Russo-German combination against the West.[2]

The first step in any policy of reconciliation with Russia was to grant recognition to the Soviet régime. This the Government did, unconditionally, on 1 February, hardly more than a week after taking office. Even so, the tale persists that MacDonald, influenced by his Foreign Office officials, opposed this step, and only gave in under pressure from Labour M.P.s and the London Trades Council. H. N. Brailsford has described an approach made to him by the Soviet chargé d'affaires, Rakovsky, just before Labour took office, in which the Russian is said to have proposed that the two socialist Governments of the world work out a common policy for peace, including drastic disarmament and Russian adherence to the League of Nations. Brailsford informed MacDonald of this, and suggested a meeting between the new Prime Minister and Rakovsky, but MacDonald refused, adding, says Brailsford, that his information was that the Soviet régime faced imminent collapse, and that he had no intention of recognizing it under the circumstances. He sent Arthur Ponsonby, the Under-Secretary, to lunch with Brailsford and Rakovsky, but Ponsonby could talk of nothing but the Russian debts to the City. "I tried and Rakovsky tried again and again to raise the real issue—a common socialist policy of peace," reports Brailsford, but to no avail. The sequel, according to him, was that recognition came only under pressure from E. D. Morel and others.[3]

It may be that the Government hesitated briefly before granting recognition—long enough for the hyper-sensitive Labour following to begin worrying. Lenin had just died, and there was a fresh wave of reports that the Soviet régime was

breaking up. MacDonald had no love for the Bolsheviks, and was cautious by nature. But at the Albert Hall meeting on 8 January he had asserted that "the pompous folly of standing aloof from the Russian Government will be ended", and Clynes had attacked non-recognition in the Censure Debate later that month.[4] It is not likely that MacDonald had so little understanding of his party's attitude on the question as to have entertained ideas of snubbing the Soviets permanently. In fact, MacDonald was in touch with Rakovsky through a mutual friend, to whom he wrote on 3 January, "I need not assure you that I am in favour of Soviet recognition. . . . My opinion is that it must be done immediately."[5] The fact that recognition, when it came, was unconditional supports the view that the short delay was routine,[6] whatever doubts MacDonald may understandably have had concerning the amount of common ground existing between his Government and M. Rakovsky's.

In recognizing the Soviets the Government had laid its hands on the most explosive issue in British politics. The very facts on which judgments of policy must be based were in dispute. For many Labourites, friendship with Russia was the one foreign policy issue that really mattered; for many of their opponents, to make overtures to the Soviets was to embrace Evil itself. The act of recognition gave fresh impetus to the villification of Labour in extreme Tory journals, as witness *Blackwood's Magazine*:

> [MacDonald] has been true to the impulse which once drove him to suggest the establishment in Great Britain of Soldiers' and Workers' Unions [*sic*]. He still remembers the wonder with which the achievements of the ineffable Lenin filled him, and he has done his best to satisfy the wishes once expressed by the dead "master".*

The fury of such observers was intensified by the fact that the recognition Note also invited the Soviets to a conference in London to discuss several specified questions, including the

**Blackwood's*, March 1924, p. 441. The reference is to the 1917 Leeds Conference of labour groups, held before the October Revolution in Russia. The quotation marks around "master" are presumably supposed to imply that MacDonald had so referred to Lenin.

claims of the Government and of British citizens against the Soviets, and the issue of Soviet propaganda. This conference would also "draw up the preliminary bases of a complete treaty to settle all questions outstanding between the two countries".[7] The Russians agreed, and on 14 April the Conference opened. It dragged on, through various stages, for four months. Meanwhile, a continuous running fight over policy towards Russia went on among British groups and parties.

Debate centred on the matter of Anglo-Russian trade, and particularly on the question of extending the Export Credits and Trade Facilities schemes to include Russia. Three main viewpoints stood out. Strong proponents, mostly Labourites but led by Lieutenant Commander Kenworthy (later Lord Strabolgi), then a Liberal, argued that Russia needed the products of just those industries in which British unemployment was worst, such as the engineering trades, and could supply British needs in foods and raw materials. These Members were intolerant of any opposition to credits to Russia, attributing it to prejudice against a land where the workers were in power.[8] On the other side, the die-hard enemies of the Soviets argued that it was impossible to do business with Russia. The Soviet Government was capricious, and foreign commercial interests were at its mercy, without proper legal protection. The Russians, judging others by themselves, "cannot understand that a man goes to Russia for business, and not for political propaganda"; if he wants to investigate the prospects for any line of trade, he is accused of " 'economic espionage'." Furthermore, although giving credits to British traders looks innocent, if the Russians with whom they are trading should default in their payments, the British taxpayer is the loser.[9]

Between the two warring camps stood those Members who, usually because of special interests in their constituencies, urged credits for practical, limited reasons, and avoided political tirades on either side.[10] In the middle, also, stood the Government, anxious to withhold extension of credits for use as a bargaining point in the Conference.

At first, little was said about the possibility of a direct loan to the Soviets. On 12 February MacDonald said, "I have no

intention of going any further, so far as Government credit is concerned, than overseas credit, trade facilities credit, and such things as have already in principle been approved regarding other countries by the House of Commons, and I have no reason to doubt that would be quite adequate."[11] Yet it was soon clear that the Russians would be seeking a loan when they came to London; during February and March, both Rakovsky and his chief, Krassin, referred to it repeatedly in public speeches.[12] Occasionally a Conservative would warn against a loan, but pressure on the other side only developed after some months, when it became gradually apparent that the Anglo-Russian negotiations were making no progress. On 29 May, W. H. Hutchinson, member both of the Labour Party and the Amalgamated Engineering Union Executives, urged a guaranteed loan; A. A. Purcell carried the case to Parliament in late June, and Kenworthy repeated the suggestion two weeks later. John Hill, Secretary of the Boilermakers' Union, recommended it to a Cabinet Committee in June or July, and both the *New Leader* and the *Daily Herald* supported it editorially.[13]

The counterpart of the Soviet desire for a loan was the British demand for satisfaction for pre-Revolutionary Russia's creditors in the United Kingdom, and for Britishers who had suffered losses during and after the Revolution. The link between claims and loan was direct: Rakovsky said outright that "should we not be required to pay off certain liabilities, we would not ask for a loan".[14]

In person or by proxy, the British claimants played a major part in the developments of 1924. Through the Association of British Creditors in Russia they exerted pressure on the Government; through a Committee of the Council of Foreign Bondholders they met the Russian delegation itself over tea. Through friendly M.P.s, they urged deputations upon the Prime Minister. Some were themselves M.P.s.[15] The business community rallied to their support. At the outset of the Conference, the Soviet delegates were greeted by a "Bankers' Memorandum", in which the City's stiff terms for the re-establishment of Russian credit were set forth. Rakovsky called it "an actual attempt to make us renounce the very foundations of the Soviet

Socialistic organization". Conservatives could not understand his anger; E. C. Grenfell, M.P., did not see why the Soviets should "be too proud to accept advice, and to follow it; and if you like to call it going into the receiver's hands, well, it will be the hands of a very friendly receiver in this case".[16]

The issue of compensation and debts was treated by the Opposition as a moral question; the Russian treatment of property was made into a financial atrocity story, to add to the tales of physical atrocity so continually described by anti-Soviet publicists. Mr. Martin, blind from imprisonment in Russia, competed for attention in Parliamentary Debates with payments for British goods supplied in the war, and now sequestered in the Soviet State Bank. The issue lent itself to oversimplification; Tories compared the Russian offers of partial satisfaction to a thief who robs you of £100 and then offers a few paltry shillings in settlement. In vain did Labour defenders point out that unbridled attacks upon the Soviets merely endangered the one means by which any satisfaction whatever could be achieved, namely a negotiated settlement. Too many Conservatives either wished to sabotage the negotiations, presumably in the hope that the Red régime might still collapse, or else sincerely believed that business relations were impossible until the Soviets abandoned their sinful ways. They were simply unable to fit a revolution into the normal pattern of British business life, or to understand how a Russian would view the idea that Anglo-Russian affairs hinged on the debts accumulated by the Czars in the days of war and chaos. For the same reason, they could not comprehend the Russian demand for counter-concessions to cover damage done by the foreign intervention on the side of the Whites. Cried Ronald McNeill, former Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, "Why should there be any counter-concessions? These claims of ours are debts. . . ."*

The Government's job in dealing with the debts and compensation question was difficult. Labourites made very little use of the counter-cry against the big, bad bondholder as the

*175 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1912. One is inevitably reminded of President Coolidge's remark about the Allied war debts: "They hired the money, didn't they?"

selfish obstacle to Anglo-Russian reconciliation—perhaps because they could not stress this without losing all hope of Parliamentary approval for whatever agreement was reached with the Russians. As for settling the claims, the mere matter of estimating their magnitude was subject for debate; the job of assessing the cost to Russia of the Allied intervention was, on the face of it, impossible. And what were to be the basic principles of a settlement? It was easy for Labour to ridicule the arch-Tory demand that the Russians abandon all this Communism nonsense, repay the Czarist debts *in toto*, and get themselves a few decent British law courts, as a prerequisite of any agreement. But it was another matter to find a compromise policy which was realistic, which cleared the way for a fresh start in trade and peaceful relations between Britain and the Soviet Union, and yet gave promise of being defensible against the assaults of those who would enjoy nothing more than accusing the Labour Government of buying Soviet friendship with the money of innocent British investors.

The negotiations were further complicated by the old issue of Communist propaganda and subversion. The Trade Agreement of 1921 contained a clause supposedly protecting the British Empire from these evils; of course it had not worked. Lord Curzon had protested bitterly and in vain against anti-British propaganda in the East. MacDonald told Parliament he would insist that the Soviets mend their ways, but Liberals and Conservatives maintained a steady barrage of questions and comments on the issue none the less, ranging from the Tory M.P. who said that he knew, when he saw poor people going into public houses with lots of money to spend, that it was Moscow gold, to the several occasions on which it was suggested that members of the Russian Conference delegation itself might carry on propaganda activities while in Britain. On the latter point, MacDonald's response was more of a warning to the Russians than a rebuff to their critics: "The Soviet delegates are here on a friendly mission, and unless and until definite evidence to the contrary is forthcoming, it is to be presumed that they will abstain from actions which could only stultify the negotiations now pending."[17]

Even more uncomfortable for the Labour Government were questions concerning Communist activities in Britain, and Government measures to keep watch over them.[18] For there were still many Labour M.P.s who could not see any clear distinction between the agitational activities for which they themselves had from time to time been persecuted, and the activities of the Communists. To such people, it was tragic that their Government, which was to portend a new era, should continue the usual precautions against subversion from the Left.

In short, the negotiations with the Soviets not only dealt with questions at once complex and politically explosive, but were carried on in an abnormal atmosphere of tension and recrimination. Hostile critics spent as much time attacking the internal régime in Russia as discussing the questions before the Conference. Efforts were made to question the authority of the Government with which Ponsonby was dealing.[19] The most routine matters became subjects of grave concern—should the British Government express condolences on the death of Lenin? Or, upon mere mention of a proposal to bring over some Russians to teach their language in Britain, "Will murder be taught in the schools?"[20] Both sides played endless games of "What about": if someone accused the Russians of tyrannical acts, there was usually someone ready to respond, "Well, what about the Turks?"

Nor did the Soviets do much to relieve the tensions or reduce the abnormality of the situation. As so frequently before and since, they behaved most peculiarly for a régime allegedly trying to come to peaceful terms with its fellows.[21] In the midst of the Conference came word that the Russo-Caucasian Company, formed in 1922 to trade with Russia, had been given one month's notice to liquidate its affairs in the USSR. Eventually, after taking the matter up with the Soviet delegation in London, Ponsonby was able to say that the liquidation had been suspended pending new negotiations between the Company and the Soviet authorities. Such occurrences only undermined confidence in the possibilities of a stable agreement, and gave magnificent openings to anti-Russian critics.[22]

When a modicum of friendliness or forbearance might have improved the situation considerably, the Soviets apparently could not find that modicum. There was interminable delay in arranging the appointment of British consuls to Russia; by late July, after months of prodding, MacDonald could only say that the matter remained under consideration. The old abuse of the British continued in the Soviet press: MacDonald was a "flunkey of the bourgeoisie", with "a policy of militarism more open and avowed than even that of his predecessors"; Henderson dined with "the spies of Scotland Yard". Trotsky, touring through Russia, made lurid speeches charging MacDonald with trying to thwart the Soviets' peaceful aims, and then boasting that if foreign loans were obtained, "The Union of Soviet Republics within four years will be converted into a mighty state", ready for the "inevitable bitter struggle" with the capitalist world, a struggle "which must last years and perhaps decades".[23]

It was a bizarre group of Russians who arrived in mid-April to begin the negotiations. The favourite of the photographers was a one-legged agitator from Turkestan, dressed in his native costume. They were "an agreeable and easy-going party", though one of them is said to have got drunk on beer and vodka at the Prime Minister's luncheon for them. Rakovsky was at their head, but one of the British negotiators later wrote that he was never sure who the real leaders of the Russian delegation were, or what instructions they had.[24]

The Conference began with speeches by MacDonald and Rakovsky. The Prime Minister's tone was firm; there were no effusions after the style of his letters to Poincaré. After performing this initial function, he turned the British delegation over to Ponsonby, and the Conference settled down to a slow, drab process. From late April to early August, little progress was reported—in fact little news of any kind. Members of Parliament grew more and more restive; the House of Lords passed a resolution, as early as 28 May, asking that the negotiations be concluded as quickly as possible. On 4 July, *The Times* asked snappishly, "What purpose, then, can this exhausted and discredited Conference now possibly serve? It has become com-

pletely unintelligible." Ponsonby could offer nothing but apologies and vague assurances to the House of Commons; in lieu of official news, Members spoke on the basis of rumours or their own unofficial information. Apparently, the recourse to such extraordinary tactics as sending the visiting delegates off to negotiate directly with the City had been of no avail. Some friends of Russia suspected that the permanent officials of the Foreign Office were sabotaging the Conference; it was suggested that the Government replace them with men of the Labour movement, and put A. A. Purcell, Left-wing M.P. and Chairman of the TUC in 1924, at the head of the British side.[25]

Then, just before the Recess, came the announcement that the Conference had broken down at long last, without reaching an agreement. *The Times* was sympathetic; the Reparations Conference was at its height, a crisis over the Irish Boundary Commission had arisen, and now this. At such a point, any criticism of the Government "should be discriminating, severely practical, and, as far as possible, constructive".[26] No sooner was this being read, however, than a second announcement was issued, proclaiming not only the resumption of the negotiations but their successful conclusion in two Anglo-Russian Treaties, a Commercial Treaty and a general one. On the morning of 5 August there had been failure; by the time Arthur Ponsonby faced an incredulous House the next afternoon he had two agreements to report. What had happened?

A fairly full account of the events of 5 and 6 August was published by E. D. Morel, a leading participant, in *Forward* for 23 August 1924. Although frequent efforts were made to twist what he wrote, his version does not appear to have been challenged. The Conference, according to Morel, had adjourned on 26 July so that Rakovsky could return to Moscow for a visit. During his absence, the British Cabinet had agreed that the Treaty should contain the promise of a guaranteed loan to Russia,* conditional upon a settlement of the vexed compensation and debts problems along certain lines. So, when the

*But only after a struggle, in which MacDonald and Henderson backed Ponsonby against Snowden, Thomas, Olivier and Wedgwood. Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1951), II, 483.

Conference reconvened on 4 August, only one obstacle remained: a disagreement over the wording, in Article 13, concerning compensation for British ex-owners of Russian nationalized property; the Russians, while willing to settle with the major claimants, were anxious to avoid any statement that might cast doubt on the validity of their nationalization decrees, or open the way to endless negotiation over petty claims, precedent to a general settlement. There followed a nineteen-hour session in which the weary negotiators tried in vain to overcome the difficulty. It was after this that the failure communique was issued. Hearing the news, six M.P.s especially interested in Anglo-Soviet accord met with Ponsonby at 2 p.m. on 5 August, in his room at the House of Commons. The six persuaded him to authorize their getting in touch with the Russians directly, and at 8.30 that evening the six Members, plus some twelve colleagues, met with the Russian delegation in a conference room at the House of Commons. After an hour's discussion, the eighteen M.P.s chose four of their number—Morel, Lansbury, A. A. Purcell and R. C. Wallhead—to go back to Ponsonby, armed with a formula for settlement. This was accepted, and the four returned to the Russians, who were still waiting at the House, to arrange a resumption of negotiations with the British Government for the next morning. But this meeting again fell into deadlock, and at 1.30 p.m. on the 6th, just four hours before the Government was due to make its statement to the House of Commons, the four Members were again in consultation with Ponsonby, working out another formula for presentation to the Russians. Finally, at the Russian Agency Office in New Bond Street, the four, reinforced by other unofficial negotiators, secured the Soviet acceptance. It was communicated to Ponsonby at the Foreign Office by 2.45; by 3.30 the final details were settled, and at 7.30 the Under Secretary announced the agreement to the House.

Before Morel's account appeared, the one thing that everyone knew was that there had been a breakdown and that it had been through the intervention of interested Members of Parliament that a resumption of the talks had been brought about and a treaty signed. The cry went up immediately that the Govern-

ment was being run by its extremists; for the first time, Labour's opponents saw a chance to paint the Ministry Red. Had MacDonald not flatly denied, as late as 18 June, that "the Government has considered the guaranteeing, or proposes to consider the guaranteeing, of any Russian obligation"?[27] It was only too easy to assume that what the Back-benchers' intervention had done was to coerce Ministers into accepting the loan at the last minute.

Nor was the manner of presenting the two Treaties to the House at all reassuring. Ponsonby himself had no copy of the final documents the first day of the debate. When copies were distributed, the next day, some thought that the two documents were the Draft over which the breakdown had come on the 5th and the final Treaty; Ponsonby had to explain that one was the General Treaty, the other the Commercial Treaty. There were wrangles over Parliamentary procedure; Ponsonby made a weak showing, MacDonald excused himself on the grounds that he had another Conference to handle and that this one had been entrusted to Ponsonby. The Government's strongest support came from the Liberal, Kenworthy.[28]

The agreements that emerged from so long a gestation and frantic a delivery were not a very promising pair of twins.[29] The Commercial Treaty was a straightforward one, in which the Russians granted most favoured nation treatment to Britain and the British extended the export credits scheme to Russia. The only novel feature was a grant of diplomatic immunity to members of the Russian Trading Mission in Britain, and the number of persons to whom this privilege would be limited was left to be determined at some later date.

Leaving things to be determined later was the hallmark of the General Treaty. The Russians did grant the claims of the British bondholders in principle, as an exception to the confiscation decrees of 1918. But the terms on which the claims would be met were left for a later treaty which the British Government would only conclude after being "satisfied that such terms have been accepted by the holders of not less than one-half of the capital values" of the British holdings concerned. In other words, there would have to be further negotiations

between the Russians and the bondholders—time, place and details not defined. Under Article 7, all claims between the Governments themselves were held over for discussion at some later date. So were the claims of British nationals for loss or damage between 7 November 1917 and the Trade Agreement of 16 March 1921. Other claims for loss or injury were to be settled by a lump sum payment, to be distributed by the British Government. The amount of this sum was left for a Commission of three persons from each side to determine. A similar Commission was to "examine the validity and ascertain the amount" of the claims of British ex-owners of Russian nationalized property. The Russians, again by exception to their Decrees, agreed to negotiate with these persons.

Then came the explosive Articles 11 and 12, in which it was provided that there would be a later treaty embodying all these settlements of claims, and that upon the signing of *that* treaty a loan to Russia would be guaranteed by the British Government. Thus the loan was made conditional upon a settlement of claims, and a settlement which, among other things, would be acceptable to the holders of at least half the value of British bondholdings. Furthermore, it was explicitly stated that the proposed later treaty, which would also contain the "amount, terms, and conditions of the said loan and the purposes to which it shall be applied", would not come into force until Parliamentary authority for the loan guarantee had been obtained.

This cautious and complex agreement aroused a storm of criticism, in which the Labour Government was eventually swept away, and the Liberal Party was reduced to a mere Parliamentary fraction.

The attack began at once, with the Tories' extraordinary insistence that the Government should withhold its signature from the Treaties until Parliament had approved them. The only shadow of an excuse for this unprecedented demand was that the Labour Government, being in a minority, could not count on Parliamentary support for its foreign policy. The Liberal *Daily News* commented on 8 August that it was "difficult to explain, except on the assumption of rather paltry motives, the heat of the outcry against the signing of the

Russian Treaty". Clearly the Government could expect no quarter in this fight for survival.

Critics of the Treaties had the choice of two promising lines of attack: either they could dismiss the agreement as a meaningless sham that postponed all the important questions for the future; or they could denounce it as a dangerous flirtation with Soviet tyranny, a pact of friendship with murderers, forced on the Government by Left-wingers intervening in the closing hours of the negotiations. The upshot was that both attacks were pressed vigorously, often simultaneously, and, despite Labour efforts to point up the contradiction between them, effectively.

The first theme received the main emphasis in the early stages of the struggle. The hectic finale of the negotiations added force to the charge that the agreement was mere face-saving, designed to conceal complete failure. Even friendly critics characterized the Treaties as little more than an expression of good will. Ponsonby did his best to make a virtue out of necessity: the Labour Government had negotiated "a general settlement on broad lines based on conciliation and co-operation", and avoiding quibbles over details. But he did admit that a settlement in actual pounds, shillings and pence had been the original goal, only abandoned when it began to seem unobtainable for the moment.[30]

In arguing that the Treaties, although meaningless, were also extremely dangerous, critics naturally concentrated on the loan, trying to make it seem imminent, a feature of the present Treaties, rather than a proposal which could only come to life after the fulfilment of many difficult conditions and the conclusion of a further, far more definitive treaty. Lloyd George's paper, the *Daily Chronicle*, even went so far as to identify the further treaty, upon which the loan was conditional, with the Commercial Treaty just concluded, thereby implying that the loan was all but granted.[31] Others were more subtle, but with or without fine distinctions, the net effect was the same: to suggest that the Government was about to lend money rashly to the Bolsheviks. The unscrupulousness increased as time went by, so that within a month *The Times* itself was saying, "Mr.

MacDonald strangely reverses the order of events. He has been saying that there will be no loan unless there is a settlement of claims, whereas the Treaty declares the loan to be the condition precedent of a settlement."*

The Labour response was resolute, though naturally tending towards the hyperbolic. The *New Leader* trumpeted:

> The courage and vision which boldly recognized Russia without conditions has been justified by the event. There are details still to work out before the whole settlement is completed. . . . But the difficult question of principle is settled. . . . Labour by this achievement alone has justified its decision to accept power.[32]

As opposition to the Treaties grew, the TUC General Council and Labour Party Executive issued a joint appeal for a vigorous campaign in support of them. At the same time, the defence now shifted somewhat. Instead of stressing the possible relief of unemployment through increased trade with Russia, Labourites now emphasized the benefits for the peace of the world from Anglo-Russian agreement. Russia would inevitably recover, some day; in preparation for that time Britain should make friends with her, bring her into the League of Nations, and wipe out the memory of Kolchak, Denikin, and the Allied intervention.[33]

If the Russians shared this desire for a re-establishment of good relations, they chose strange ways of showing it. *Pravda* pictured the Labour Government as having been forced to agree to conclude the Treaties by pressure from the Left wing; Soviet papers boasted that the agreement meant recognition of the October Revolution and the Soviet economic system. A speech by Kamenev, one of Russia's ruling triumvirate, contained similar assertions, and boasted that Britain had undertaken to guarantee a loan, while Russia had promised nothing more than to continue negotiations. He also interpreted the opposition which the Treaties had aroused as the final con-

*Both were true—i.e. the loan and settlement of claims stood or fell together, according to the Treaty. *The Times*'s version made it seem that the loan might be granted only to have the settlement fall through, however.

vulsions of the British bourgeoisie.[34] In short, whether through the blindness of ideological preconception or a desire to still possible criticism at home, the Soviet leaders ended by playing into the hands of their worst enemies in Britain.

Still, the Labour Government had one powerful argument that was almost unaffected by the inadequacies of the Treaties, or the bad behaviour of the Soviets. Sir Henry Slesser, the Solicitor General, put it in a letter to *The Times*: show us the alternative, he asked, to our policy of patient negotiation, compromise wherever possible and consistent with British interests, and refusal to shut the door to possible future agreement. There were only three other courses, said Slesser: to support counter-revolution (which had been tried and failed); to ignore Russia; or to assist Russia without assurance of *quid pro quo*, on the Bolsheviks' own terms. Was there a fifth way? Significantly, when *The Times* undertook to answer Slesser it relied on denunciations of the loan, and simply ignored his challenge to produce an alternative policy.[35]

But this issue could not be decided by sweet reason, for it was caught up in the drama of a three-way struggle for power. In this battle, Labour and Conservatives occupied more or less fixed positions. The central role was left for the Liberals—restless, unhappy, and divided—to play.

In May 1924, the Annual Conference of the National Liberal Federation had resolved:

> That the restoration of Russia is essential to European prosperity, and calls for the sincere and active cooperation of the British people, provided that she recognizes her obligations and that any loans which may come from this country should be applied not to military but only to productive purposes.[36]

This did not commit the party to support the Treaties that emerged in August, but it made opposition to a loan, before its terms had even been announced, difficult for Liberals.

The initial Liberal attitude towards the Treaties was mixed. Lloyd George attacked them unreservedly from the beginning, as "a fake . . . a contract in which the space for every essential

figure is left blank." He was not opposed in principle to agreement with Russia, but this was "a thoroughly grotesque agreement, such an agreement as has never been submitted by a Government on its responsibility to the House of Commons". He was opposed to any loan.[37]

Aside from one or two devoted advocates such as Kenworthy there was little Liberal enthusiasm for the Treaties. But many Liberals, far from sharing Lloyd George's angry disgust, merely regretted that so many questions were left unanswered. Of the major Liberal newspapers, only the *Chronicle* was hostile; the others were inclined to reserve judgment. The *Westminster Gazette* would await word as to the amount and conditions of the loan before making a final decision. The *Manchester Guardian*, while not committing itself to support of the Treaties, attacked "the extravagant and rather hysterical" opposition to them expressed in Parliament. Liberals, it continued, could not take this line unless they were prepared to reverse their policy and condemn any accommodation whatever with the Soviets. The *Daily News* went still further, accusing critics of overlooking the fact that the Treaties, whatever their shortcomings in detail, did constitute an attempt to end the era of mutual suspicion and hatred between the two countries.[38]

In the lull that ensued while Parliament went into Recess, Lloyd George continued to attack the Government and all its works. There had long been indications that he was prepared to reverse the decision of the previous December by which the Liberals had supported a Labour Government.* The Russian Treaties simply became more grist for his mill. Sir Alfred Mond's victory, with an almost unchanged majority, in the Carmarthen by-election on 15 August greatly heartened the Liberals, making them less fearful of a showdown with the Government, and returning to Parliament a man as determined as Lloyd George to bring the Ministry down.[39]

Towards the end of August, Liberal opposition to the Treaties increased. Simon called them "ridiculous"; Runciman attacked "the new and more dangerous form of secret diplomacy" by which they had been concluded.[40] On the 29th, the

*See below, pp. 235-7.

Daily News came out against the Treaties, basing its opposition on the intention of the Russians "to impose their creed upon us", but protesting at the same time that "the political and commercial ostracism of Russia is a disaster for this country, a calamity for Russia, and a misfortune for the world". On 3 September, the Liberal Publication Department's pamphlet, "A Sham Treaty", was announced,[41] and the *New Leader* that week saw the shift towards opposing the Treaties as a sign that Lloyd George had captured the party. But the struggle was not over. On the 8th, just as the *Chronicle* began a series entitled "In Darkest Russia", there were reports of two speeches by Liberal M.P.s. J. J. O'Neill said that, although the party was divided, a majority would support the Government on the Russian issue, with the Lloyd George wing probably abstaining; Major Gwilym Lloyd George, however, said he would vote against the Treaties and so, he believed, would the majority of Liberals.[42]

Lloyd George, sen., made a major effort to commit his party in a speech at Penmaenmawr on the 10th. He had consulted all the available Liberal leaders, he said, before attacking the Treaties. The list was formidable—Simon, Masterman, Vivian Phillipps and others—but did not include Asquith, who was unavailable. The Welshman made his point clear: the Liberals would be challenging the Government on a major issue, but "If the Liberal Party were to shirk that challenge, it would forfeit the confidence and respect of the nation". Should the Government dissolve, he was sure that it would sustain the worst electoral defeat in British history.[43]

At the same time, two Liberal M.P.s accused Lloyd George of trying to stampede the party into opposing the Treaties.[44] And the *Westminster Gazette*, while still withholding judgment on the loan until its amount was known, pointed out that the loan was not everything:

> The Treaty regularizes the relations between the two great peoples. It opens up avenues of trade which many leading business men who have no sympathy with Bolshevism have clamoured to have opened. . . . Above all, it is a first step towards the re-entry of Russia into the

> comity of European nations, and how far can we get along the road towards peace and disarmament until not merely that first step but many further steps have been taken? The Russian problem is something much bigger than a matter of borrowing and of repaying borrowings.[45]

Then, agreeing with Lloyd George that the Government would be beaten in any election on the Treaties, the *Gazette* indulged in some prophecy that was to prove as accurate as it was lugubrious: reconciliation with Russia would become more difficult than ever, and the release of fanaticism on both sides at home "would tend to produce just that alignment of forces in British politics which most Liberals have worked long and hard to prevent".

The turning point seems to have come during the following week. On the 14th, Lord Beauchamp, soon to take Grey's place as Liberal leader in the Lords, made a speech in which, while criticizing the Labour Government and the way in which the Treaties were introduced, he concluded that "all classes of Liberals would welcome the Russian Treaty". The next day, Lloyd George issued a statement saying that he had "the highest authority for saying that the leader of the party fully approves of my action" regarding the Treaties.[46] The *Daily News* reported that this came after a luncheon at Asquith's country home attended by Lloyd George, Mond, and Sir Donald Maclean; the leaders had decided to table a series of amendments to the Russian Treaties, especially concerning the proposed loan.

It seemed as if Lloyd George were winning the day. Asquith remained silent. Lord Beauchamp now attacked the "mischievous attempt" to see Liberal dissensions where none existed, and tried to make it seem as if he had himself been a consistent critic of the Treaties. Lord Grey delivered a strong attack on them.[47]

The anti-Lloyd George forces fell back on a last line of defence: let the Liberals rest content with an amendment that would make it clear that Parliament was not committing itself in advance to the guaranteed loan, but would deal with it on its merits when the further treaty, not yet negotiated, was con-

cluded. The Lloyd George forces reacted strongly to this new danger. The *Daily Chronicle*, ignoring the fact that Asquith had so far said nothing, denounced the idea of merely modifying the Draft Treaty as being "in contradiction to the attitude taken up by Mr. Asquith, as well as by Mr. Lloyd George, of hostility to the whole proposed agreement".[48]

On 22 September, Asquith at last broke silence. In an open letter, he voiced his objections to "the so-called 'Treaty' with the Soviet Government".[49] The letter was a strange mixture, extremely careful to stay on the right side of as many questions as possible, yet going out of its way to be offensive at times. He denied any hostility to the Russian people and lauded their greatness—"though in some ways they may not have reached the standard of Western civilization". He did not condemn the guaranteed loan in principle; what he objected to was "the proposal that Parliament should afford the countenance even of an anticipatory and contingent sanction to the guarantee by the taxpayers of Great Britain of a loan of undefined amount upon unspecified conditions to the Soviet Government". This seemed to leave the way open to the amendment-without-rejection for which the anti-Lloyd Georgians yearned; yet other phrases in the letter seemed to bar any compromise. "I associate myself without reserve with the protests already made by my colleagues," he wrote, and ended by characterizing the Treaties as "crude experiments in nursery diplomacy", a gratuitous insult which was hotly resented in Labour circles.

Largely because of its mixed tone, the Asquith letter did not quite end the struggle in his party. Even so experienced a politician as Sir Donald Maclean was among those who now hoped that MacDonald could reopen negotiations with the Russians and get the clearer and more definite agreement that Asquith apparently wanted. The *Manchester Guardian* thought that this would not only test Russian sincerity, but also bring out "what those who criticize the indefiniteness of the present Treaty would themselves have insisted upon if they had had the making of it". The *Westminster Gazette* was very glum at first; it made no attempt to support the Liberal rejection of the Treaty, but blamed the whole thing on MacDonald's refusal to consult

with the Liberals before taking important action. By the week's end, however, fortified by MacDonald's promises that Parliament would have its chance to pass on the details of the loan—which had been clear all along—the *Gazette* argued that no one need now reject the Treaties altogether "unless he is opposed to any loan to Russia of any amount and on any conditions". The *Chronicle*, however, could see nothing in Asquith's letter but an endorsement of Lloyd George, and continued its technique of blandly representing its own view as the undisputed view of the party.[50]

The Liberal Parliamentary Party meeting of 1 October dispelled all doubts. Contrary to the hopes of the compromisers, Asquith urged opposition to any loan guarantees, quoting extensively from a Kamenev speech to show how different were the Russian and the British interpretations of the Treaties.* The motion formulated at this meeting praised some features of the Treaties, including the extension of export credits, but condemned the loan in terms too sweeping to invite compromise. *The Times* reported that only two M.P.s spoke for the Treaties. There was some urging that the party must stand firm once their opposition had been declared; the Liberals, weary of being marched up the hill and then marched down again, wanted no repetition of the Poplar fiasco.†

This ended all but sporadic opposition among Liberals to Lloyd George's view. The *Westminster Gazette* sadly admitted that it was now up to the Government to decide whether it could possibly amend its Russian policy to meet the Liberal criticisms.[51] Kenworthy tried to organize a Liberal "cave" to support the Government, and presumably the handful of Liberals who voted with Labour on the Campbell case on 8 October would have done so on the Treaties had they come up for a vote. But Lloyd George's victory was about as complete as possible, given the internal divisions of his party. The Labour Government was doomed.

**Forward*, 18 Oct. 1924, pointed out that he omitted such portions of the speech as Kamenev's statement, "We desire to obtain a loan on purely business principles, which shall be profitable to both sides".

†See above, pp. 133–4.

No one could describe the Government's Russian policy as a success. The negotiations with the Soviets were carried on as a kind of subsidiary operation, with the Foreign Secretary and top Foreign Office personnel greatly preoccupied with other urgent problems. And yet, considering the appalling difficulties in the way of any agreement whatever with the Russians, the Treaties, unsatisfactory though they were, probably represented the most that was obtainable at the time.

There is some evidence that business interests and the Conservatives themselves, in their calmer moments, realized the necessity of some policy such as this towards Russia. The *Iron and Coal Trades Review* thought that the guaranteed loan was "no worse—even if the money is eventually lost—than the dole", and that Russia might become a good customer.[52] The Conservative *Glasgow Herald*, after the election and the safe return of a Tory Government, blandly declared that the Tories had never opposed any attempt to revive trade with Russia, and were not opposed to a loan; it was simply that they had not trusted the Labour Government to exact enough security for it.[53]

The temptation to make political capital out of the Russian issue was irresistible, however. This most moderate of socialist Governments had finally been caught, if not exactly in bed with the Communists, at least seated around the table with them. The Conservative *Observer*'s diplomatic correspondent put it bluntly when he wrote of "the unthinking prejudice against Russia which was mobilized for election purposes".[54]

But under these circumstances the Government should have been especially careful to avoid blunders in dealing with Russia. MacDonald should not have excluded the possibility of a loan guarantee, even if he at first thought the Soviets would be able to borrow in the City without it.[55] The Russians had given ample warning that a loan would be their price for any settlement of the British claims, and the Prime Minister must have been aware of the temper of his own party, or at least its more vocal sections, concerning the absolute necessity of some agreement with the USSR.

It was even worse, from the point of view of political tactics,

to have allowed a situation to develop in which the intervention of the Back-benchers became necessary. This intervention, while more than "a timely assistance to a renewal of touch that would anyhow have been accomplished",[56] as one Labour sympathizer described it, was hardly the coercion of a reluctant Government by extremists, as so luridly portrayed by the Opposition. A comparative reading of the abortive Draft (Cmd. 2253) and the Treaty as it finally appeared (Cmd. 2260) will demonstrate how slight a change sufficed to break the deadlock. The intervention seems to have served two purposes: it brought fresh minds to bear on the problem of devising verbal formulae, and it stiffened the determination, flagging after so long and trying an ordeal, of Ponsonby and the Government to get some agreement with the Russians, and at least prevent an open breach. But whatever the fine shadings may be between coercion and stiffening determination, the back-Benchers' extraordinary manoeuvres did give opponents another stick with which to beat the Government.[57]

It is pointless to wonder what would have resulted had MacDonald embraced Rakovsky's proposal for a united socialist foreign policy. The fact is that there was as much in common between the foreign policies of MacDonald and Lord Curzon as there was between MacDonald's and that of the Soviets. If any proof of this is needed, there is the Labour Government's ready espousal of the bondholders' cause. What the Government did have to offer towards a better Russian policy than that of its predecessors was a relative absence of prejudice, a realization of the tremendous importance to world peace of a reconciliation with the Soviet Union, and a determination to get that reconciliation if it were humanly and honourably possible. These were no inconsiderable contributions.

Where the Government fell down most seriously was in the exercise of political judgment at home. It is noteworthy that Snowden, though he thought the Treaties "a farcical arrangement", apparently failed to see the political danger at the time. Of the back-Benchers' formula he writes that "it seemed so innocuous and so meaningless that as a mere face-saving device I had no objection to it if it would save the Conference from

complete collapse."[58] Far from proving innocuous, the Treaties gave Lloyd George his opportunity to manoeuvre the Labour Government out of office. Even so, and even if any real friendship with the Soviets was beyond the possibility of achievement in 1924, the Labour Government's effort was not an ignoble one. The true ignominy attaches rather to those who, in Britain and in Moscow, combined to stultify that effort.

NOTES

[1]George Lansbury, *My Life* (London, 1928), p. 228.
[2]J. R. MacDonald, *Foreign Policy for the Labour Party* (London, 1923), pp. 49–50.
[3]*New Statesman and Nation*, 4 Aug. 1945, p. 74. See also Allen Hutt, *Post-War History of the British Working Class* (London, 1937), p. 90; L. MacNeil Weir, *Tragedy of Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1938), pp. 171–2; W. P. and Z. K. Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (London, 1945), pp. 131–3.
[4]*The Times*, 9 Jan. 1924; 169 H.C. Deb. 5 s., 303 (17 Jan. 1924).
[5]Quoted in Louis Fischer, *Soviets in World Affairs*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1951), II, 473. Fischer does not name this intermediary.
[6]Duff Cooper's diary, 29 Jan. 1924, implies that delay was routine. Cooper (Viscount Norwich), *Old Men Forget* (London, 1953), p. 123. Cooper was private secretary to Ponsonby, Under-Secretary at F.O., in 1924.
[7]British Note of 1 Feb. 1924, reprinted in Arnold Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1924* (London, 1926), p. 491.
[8]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1632—3; 170: 1450; 175: 419, 1896–7.
[9]175 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1902–3, 1894; 169: 780.
[10]Sir W. Allen (flax trade), 169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 812–13; Rentoul (fishing), 170: 2251; Hore-Belisha (ships), 176: 2036; Sir A. Sinclair (fishing), 169: 1141, etc.
[11]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 769.
[12]Toynbee, *Survey*, p. 236.
[13]*Daily Herald*, 29 May 1924; 175 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 65 (23 June 1924) and 1878–9 (7 July 1924); *Boilermakers' Monthly*, July 1924, p. 10; *New Leader*, 11 July 1924, p. 2; *Daily Herald*, 28 July 1924.
[14]*The Times*, 26 Apr. 1924.
[15]Toynbee, *Survey*, p. 236; 175 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1917; 173: 453; 175: 1847–50.
[16]*The Times*, 14, 26 Apr. 1924; 175 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1855. See also Fischer, II, 478–9.
[17]173 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1809 (19 May 1924).
[18]See, e.g. 174 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2297, 2360.

[19]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1367; 173: 1808.
[20]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1002–3; 177: 296–7.
[21]For confusion of Soviet diplomacy, and effect of internal struggles upon it, see T. H. von Laue, "Soviet Diplomacy . . . 1918–30", in *The Diplomats, 1919–39*, ed. Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, 1953), Ch. VIII.
[22]*The Times*, 18 June 1924; 176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 341 (16 July 1924).
[23]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 861; *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, quoted in *The Times*, 12 Apr. 1924; *The Times*, 24 Apr. 1924.
[24]J. D. Gregory, *On the Edge of Diplomacy* (London, 1929), p. 147. Informed accounts of the negotiations are conveniently available in Fischer, *Soviets in World Affairs*, II, 471–90, and Toynbee, *Survey*, pp. 233–45.
[25]*The Times*, 4 July 1924; 175 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1914–20; 1820–5 and 1834; W. P. Coates, then secretary of Hands Off Russia Committee, in *Forward*, 17 May 1924.
[26]*The Times*, 6 Aug. 1924.
[27]174 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2095.
[28]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 3012–82, 3131–86.
[29]See *Parl. Papers 1924*; the General Treaty is Cmd. 2260; the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation is Cmd. 2261; the General Treaty Draft as it stood at the breakdown of negotiations is Cmd. 2253.
[30]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 3021, 3017–18.
[31]*Daily Chronicle*, 8 Aug. 1924. The error is unaccountably repeated by Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey* (London, 1954), p. 681.
[32]*New Leader*, 8 Aug. 1924. The only Labour critics were *Justice*, the Social Democratic Federation organ, and the *New Statesman*, then Lib.-Lab. in outlook; see *Gleanings and Memoranda*, Oct. 1924, p. 415.
[33]See *Railway Review*, 10 Oct. 1924, p. 4, and 176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 3036-7. Also, MacDonald at the League of Nations Assembly on 4 Sept. 1924, quoted in M.A. Hamilton, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1929), p. 227.
[34]*The Times*, 27 Aug. 1924; *Daily Telegraph*, 2 Oct. 1924, quoting Kamenev speech of 22 Aug. 1924.
[35]*The Times*, 9 and 10 Sept. 1924.
[36]*Liberal Magazine*, June 1924, p. 341.
[37]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 3031—6, 3175–83 (6 and 7 Aug. 1924).
[38]See issues of 8 Aug. 1924 for these editorial reactions.
[39]*The Times*, 16 Aug. 1924; *Gleanings and Memoranda*, Nov. 1924, p. 614; H. Bolitho, *Alfred Mond* (London, 1933), pp. 251–3.
[40]*The Times*, 25 Aug., 1 Sept. 1924.
[41]Text in *Liberal Magazine*, Sept. 1924, pp. 523–31.
[42]*The Times*, 8 Sept. 1924.

[43]*The Times*, 11 Sept. 1924.
[44]J. J. O'Neill and J. M. Hogge; see *Daily Herald*, 10, 12 Sept. 1924.
[45]*Westminster Gazette*, 11 Sept. 1924.
[46]*The Times*, 15 Sept. 1924; *Daily News*, 16 Sept. 1924.
[47]*Daily News*, 16 Sept. 1924; *The Times*, 19 Sept. 1924.
[48]*Daily News*, 17 Sept. 1924; *Daily Chronicle*, 18 Sept. 1924.
[49]Letter publ. in *The Times*, 22 Sept. 1924.
[50]*Daily News*, 23 Sept. 1924; *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Sept. 1924; *Westminster Gazette*, 22 and 29 Sept. 1924; *Daily Chronicle*, 22 and 30 Sept. 1924.
[51]*Westminster Gazette*, 2 Oct. 1924.
[52]Quoted (n.d.) in *Forward*, 30 Aug. 1924.
[53]*Glasgow Herald*, 11 Nov. 1924, quoted in *Forward*, 15 Nov. 1924.
[54]*Observer*, 9 Nov. 1924, quoted in *Forward*, 15 Nov. 1924.
[55]As Fischer, II, 482, says was the case.
[56]M. A. Hamilton, *Ramsay MacDonald*, p. 224.
[57]On these and other points, see Stephen R. Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution, 1917–24* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), Ch. XIII. Dr. Graubard's useful study appeared after the present chapter was completed.
[58]Philip Snowden, *Autobiography* (London, 1934), II, 682.

XII

LABOURITES, SOCIALISTS AND REFORMERS

The Labour Party is, or tries to be, the party of the working classes. It aims to promote their interests, and especially to raise their social and economic position, both in absolute terms and relative to that of other groups in the country. It is also a reform party, the heir to the Radical tradition, the home of those who, regardless of their own social or economic level, wish to promote changes in the structure of government and society which they regard as progressive. And it has been, since 1918, a socialist party. These are by no means discrete categories, of course; they overlap considerably, and the party naturally strives to minimize the differences among them. The trade unionist, however preoccupied with questions of wages and hours, must nevertheless show that he considers these merely as selected aspects of a broader humanitarian purpose. The ex-Liberal patrician, bent upon achieving world peace through a reform of foreign policy, must also give evidence of a conviction that the labouring classes are the certain vehicle of all enlightened progress. Finally, both worker and reformer owe allegiance to socialism, however defined.

Opponents of Labour, angered and bewildered by this multiple nature of the party, have been quick to accuse its members of hypocrisy, and to attempt to play off proletarian against reformer, trade unionist against socialist. Conflicts of interest have sometimes erupted within the party, not only between the reformers and the working class elements, but within each group. Yet the party has survived these internal struggles, and its opponents' hopes for its early dissolution have always been dashed. In 1924, these opponents expected that the responsibility of governing might sharpen the differences within Labour ranks. In this chapter, several problems confronting the first Labour Government—aside from housing, unemployment, Russia and Western European settlement—are considered.

Some of these did bring out dissension in the party; some did not; and some brought conflict between sections of the movement and the Government itself.

Typical of the questions that stirred little argument was education. The proponents of Marxist indoctrination, as against "objective" education, were a small minority; the perennial religious issue did not arise because the Government was not in a position to attempt any sweeping reforms. Its progress, under Charles Trevelyan as Minister, was modest but respectable. It was possible without having recourse to legislation to change "the influence of the Central Department in the direction of speeding up rather than damping down local efforts".[1] Nor was money a serious obstacle; as in the case of housing there was a time lag between changes of policy and increases in actual expenditure, though Trevelyan warned that the problem of paying for progress would have to be met soon.[2] Perhaps the most valuable lesson taught by the Government's experience with education was that control of the central government was only the beginning; Labour would have to increase its strength on the Local Authorities, if its programme in this field were to be carried out.[3]

Agreement within the party was far less easy to find on matters relating to the Empire and its defence. Here the Government ran into serious trouble with many of its followers before it had been in office a month, both over the Sudan loan* and over "the five cruisers". The Baldwin Cabinet had decided upon a modest programme of naval construction, the central feature being eight new cruisers. When the new Government took over, this decision came up for review. According to Snowden, a Cabinet struggle ensued between Lord Chelmsford, speaking for the Admiralty, and himself, representing the traditional Labour coolness towards armaments. On 21 February, C. G. Ammon, Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty,† announced that "in view of the serious unemployment", the Government would proceed with the laying down of five cruisers and two destroyers.[4]

*See above, Ch. IX, p. 136.
†And author of *Christ and Labour* (1912).

The Cabinet got no credit for having cut the number from eight to five; Liberal and Labour Back-benchers joined in an attack marked by Ernest Thurtle's derisive question to the Parliamentary Secretary: was "this decision to be taken as a great moral gesture to the world?" Ministers were unable to show any urgent need for the cruisers, and they soon backed away from the unemployment argument when opponents began asking whether initiating an armaments race represented Labour's answer to the problem of the workless. On the Navy Estimates in March the Government won by 304 to 114, with the aid of solid Tory support. The minority included fourteen Labourites, and there might have been more but for the fear of playing into the Liberals' hands.[5]

The programme of building up the air force, instituted by Sir Samuel Hoare under the Conservative régime, was continued amidst the protestations of the new Air Minister, Lord Thomson, that this represented no breach in Labour's peace policy, its idealism, its hatred of appeals to force. The Government opposed successfully a number of amendments offered by its own supporters in the debates on the Army Estimates. An out-and-out pacifist amendment, to reduce the Army by 150,000 men, received just eleven votes, all Labour. Lansbury's proposal that soldiers be allowed to contract out of any obligation to perform service connected with industrial disputes was beaten by 236 to 67. Thurtle's attempt to abolish the death penalty in court martial cases, and Maxton's to permit appeals from courts martial to the Court of Criminal Appeal, got stronger support, but were beaten by 207 to 136 and 193 to 120 respectively.[6]

Behind this formidable display of orthodoxy on matters of defence loomed the massive figure of Lord Haldane. One of his purposes in joining the Government had been to protect the Committee of Imperial Defence against any possible damage arising from ignorance or pacifist zeal on the part of Ministers. He had been selected to make the new Government's first pronouncement on defence policy. His biographer states flatly: "The Government accepted Haldane's advice on national defence." It is significant that the one major breach of con-

tinuity with previous Conservative policy in this field was the abandonment of the ambitious scheme for defence construction at Singapore. Haldane was opposed to the scheme, but not so much on the grounds stressed by his party—that it might start an arms race in the Far East—as because he thought it of lower priority than rebuilding the defences of Western Europe, especially in the air.[7]

Well might the Services be relieved, and *The Times* ecstatic:

> They [the Cabinet] have shown a real largeness of view in rising above the deep-rooted prejudices of many among their adherents about "unproductive expenditure" upon armaments. . . . Whatever may be the immediate results of their action, it will, in the long run, strengthen in the country the claim of the Labour Party that they are fitted to govern. Common sense, willingness, and aptitude to learn from experience, and, above all, the moral courage to do what is right because it is right, are strong recommendations to the confidence of Englishmen.[8]

Nor is it surprising that there was some corresponding disillusionment in Labour circles. Letters and resolutions protesting against the cruisers poured in from constituents. At rumours that the Government was considering acceptance of the Singapore scheme after all, *Forward* muttered darkly, "If the five cruisers caused trouble inside the Labour Party, the acceptance of the Singapore base will cause a Revolution. We let it go at that." Even so, there are signs that the party was coming around to a less intransigeant position on armaments. The ILP Conference in 1924 reversed the previous year's recommendation that the Parliamentary Party vote against all defence estimates, despite Walter Ayles's bitter denunciation of such a retrograde step.[9]

The Government's record on defence, then, shows scarcely any concession to the party's Radical tradition. If it represents continuity within the party, it is as a continuation of the attitude of those dockyard-city Members whose votes for armaments before the 1914 War had so often caused splits within the Parliamentary group.

In its Imperial policy the Government showed a similar

willingness to sacrifice its Radical heritage. It was original only in being neither a routine Conservative policy nor a routine Liberal policy, but an amalgamation of the two. When the Imperial Preference Resolutions, born of the 1923 Imperial Conference, came up in the House of Commons, the Government allowed a free vote. But leading Ministers, including J. H. Thomas, the Colonial Secretary, spoke against the resolutions, and in the lobbies the Labour Party stood more firmly for free trade than did the Liberals: on the first resolution, which lost by 278–272, only five Labourites voted for preference, as against nineteen Liberals.*

Regarding India, on the other hand, the Labour Government's policy was not easy to distinguish from that of the Tories. The one possible exception was Gandhi's release from jail, after a serious illness, and having served two years of a six-year sentence. But it was clear from the start that no major effort at conciliation was planned. Just before taking office, MacDonald sent a personal message to inform the Swarajists that he would never be cowed "by threats of force or policies designed to bring the Government to a standstill". As the *New Leader* said later, the contrast in tone between this and the friendly letters to Poincaré was striking.[10] Indian disillusionment became even more pronounced when Lord Chelmsford, a former viceroy, was named to the new Cabinet, and Colonel Wedgwood, the most outspoken friend of Swaraj among the Labour leaders, was "excluded" from the India Office in favour of Sydney Olivier, the old Fabian and Colonial civil servant.[11] Olivier completed the Indian dismay by his rejection of the Swarajist demand for a new Round Table Conference to discuss changes in the three-year-old Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. His statement,[12] defending Britain's right to be in India on the familiar grounds that she had made India what she was today, outraged the Nationalists, and he did nothing in the remainder of his term of office that could redeem it.†

**Labour Magazine*, July 1924, p. 78. Most of the Clyde Members abstained, however; see above, Ch. IX, p. 148.

†As he himself put it later, "I came to the conclusion that the problem of India was at present insoluble." Quoted in Margaret Olivier, *Sydney Olivier* (London, 1948), p. 157.

The firm defence of the *status quo* in India, and in Egypt, Cyprus, and the Mosul oil fields as well, produced the bitterest attacks from ILP journals that the Government had to endure on any subject. The *Socialist Review* called India "the one great failure of the Labour Government", and the *New Leader* tersely outlined the tragic dilemma: "Our failure to conciliate as Labour should have conciliated has meant, in the end, that we must repress as Tories would repress. One cannot in such a situation do nothing."[13]

The Government's uninspiring record in Imperial affairs was partly the result of caution, and the desire to create confidence at home in Labour's moderation; partly it stemmed from the old difficulty: a lack of time, in ten crowded months, to develop bold new policies. Faced with real problems of Imperial policy, Ministers found new virtures in policies they would have denounced, in Opposition, as Tory Imperialism. There was, for instance, the question of using air attacks as a deterrent to certain tribal disturbances in Iraq. Defending the Government's retention of this policy, William Leach, the Under-Secretary for Air, explained that the tribal raids were blocking the progress of Iraq under its new monarchy, that previous methods of suppression, using armoured cars and the like, had meant a heavy toll of British lives, and that the bombing of tribal villages was done with advance notice and had so far cost no lives on either side. Leach, his superior, Lord Thomson, and the Colonial Secretary, Thomas, were none the less beset by angry criticisms from Labourites who had not had to make such responsible decisions of policy. There were questions from Backbenchers, and a spate of local party resolutions and letters to the *Daily Herald.* The editor of the *Herald*, Hamilton Fyfe, attacked Leach for sacrificing his principles to expediency, and quoted Shelley:

> Power, like a devastating pestilence,
> Pollutes whate'er it touches.

But when Leach, with angry irony, asked his critics for "the genuine, incorruptible and really righteous solution of this problem", they had little to offer except moralizing and slogans.[14]

After 1924, reliance on socialist clichés remained the most common response of Labourites to the problems of Empire. An uncompromisingly negative resolution, in which British rule over peoples of other races was denounced as "a form of capitalist exploitation" designed to obtain cheap raw materials and keep down the living standards of British workers, was passed by the TUC of 1925 by the overwhelming margin of 3,082,000 to 79,000, despite the fervent objections of J. H. Thomas.[15]

As a guide to what Labour in office had done in the past or was likely to do in the future, such resolutions were worthless. But Thomas's own reaction to the problem was no more constructive. Reading his speeches while Colonial Secretary, one does not wonder that *The Times* found in him "an Imperial spirit which was at once earnest, cordial, and instinct with a sense of deep responsibility." For there is never a word in them that could not have been uttered by a Conservative Imperialist, unless it was his frequently reiterated belief "that a Constitution which enabled an engine driver of yesterday to be a Secretary of State today was a great Constitution". For the rest, he merely substitutes Imperialist rhetoric for the anti-Imperialist variety more in vogue in his party. Few Labourites can have cheered his statement that the Labour Government "intended above all else to hand to their successors one thing when they gave up the seals of office, and that was the general recognition of the fact that they were proud and jealous of, and were prepared to maintain the Empire."[16]

For the early signs of a new and distinctive Labour viewpoint on the Empire one must look beyond the 1924 Cabinet. It was during the Labour Government that the Labour Commonwealth group of M.P.s was formed, on the initiative of Dr. Haden-Guest. This was the first organized effort by Labourites in the House of Commons to formulate and advance constructive Imperial policy, but it met with no enthusiasm from the Government. Meanwhile, Tom Johnston also was beginning to see the Empire in terms not of an evil to be abolished but of a complex set of problems to be solved. He used his position as editor of *Forward* to attack "Whig theories about the Colonies",

and to suggest that the Empire, properly reformed and run, might "be made the greatest lever for human emancipation the world has ever known".[17] From such beginnings, the party was gradually to develop a conviction that neither Radical libertarianism, nor pseudo-Marxist contempt, nor a limp acceptance of Tory attitudes towards the Empire would suffice for Labour. But the policy of trusteeship, with its connotation of responsibility for the fate of millions of subject peoples, was not yet full grown in 1924, even in the minds of those least satisfied with the Government's performance.

Discontent over Imperial policy centred in the ILP. For the trade unions, the first Labour Government was marked by some rather unexpected problems in the field of industrial relations. Conflicts of interest among unions were sometimes intensified by the fact that Labour was in office. The Government wished to ratify the Washington Conference Conventions of 1919 concerning the eight-hour day and forty-eight hour week. It fell before a bill could be passed, but not before various pressures and counter-pressures had been exerted. A TUC deputation reminded Tom Shaw and Margaret Bondfield of the part they themselves had played in drawing up the Convention. At the Party Conference, delegates from the Marine Workers and the Distributive Workers angrily questioned Shaw as to why he was unable to extend the provisions of his Bill to cover their people, omitted under the Convention. The NUR, however, claimed that the Convention would leave railway workers worse off than they were; its Annual Conference unanimously supported C. T. Cramp, the General Secretary, when he told how he had threatened to close down the railways on Sundays unless railwaymen were excluded from the Government Bill.[18]

More serious was the ambivalent position occupied by a working-class government that is faced with the question of industrial disputes affecting the public interest. The new Labour Government was in duty bound to protect the British public from unnecessary hardship arising from strikes. Yet the Labour Party was, of course, intimately connected with the trade union movement. In many instances, the National Joint Council,

representing the TUC General Council, the Parliamentary Labour Party, and the Labour Party Executive, spoke for the movement as a whole. The Joint Research and Information Department was engaged in preparing a brief for the Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades Federation for use in the shipbuilding dispute of May 1924, at the same time that it was supplying the Government's supporters—Labour M.P.s and committees of the Parliamentary Labour Party—with information on various subjects.[19]

There is no doubt that this sort of ambiguity has often been overstressed. The Conservative Party is heavily weighted with business interests, and is hardly less handicapped in reaching objective judgments about strikes than the Labour Party, with its trade union links. But the connexions between business and Toryism are personal, rather than institutional; this almost certainly does not lessen the bias, but it makes it less obvious. In 1924, moreover, Labour was having its first experience of holding the ring in industrial disputes. And many of the new Ministers had only just resigned their trade union posts upon taking office—so many indeed that *The Times* was worried about the resultant depletion of the ranks of responsible and experienced union leadership.[20]

On the very day of the vote of censure against the Baldwin régime, the top position on the news page went to a walkout by one of the three principal railwaymen's unions, the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen. Energetic attempts by such prominent Labourites as Arthur Henderson and J. H. Thomas to settle the dispute had failed. The root of the trouble was the Engineers' refusal to abide by a National Wages Board report which their own representatives had signed. The strike was, in fact, largely a symptom of the jurisdictional rivalry among Bromley's Engineers, Walkden's Railway Clerks and Cramp's and Thomas's giant National Union of Railwaymen. Right away, before the new Ministry had been named, some of Labour's less presentable linen was being displayed in public. The TUC General Council intervened, and the strike was ended, in virtual defeat for the Engineers, before serious damage could be done to the Nation's economy—and hence, as even *The Times*

pointed out, before the new Government could very well be called upon to intervene.[21]

Within three weeks, however, the Government met a more serious challenge, when a strike of 110,000 dock workers was called by the Transport and General Workers Union. The Minister of Labour had already been concerned with the negotiations preceding the strike; he now announced a Court of Inquiry to investigate the dockers' demand for a wage increase and decasualization. Within three days, the employers granted the terms upon which the strike was settled: the wage increase intact, and an inquiry to be set up into the matter of decasualization. Just what direction the Government intended to take had the strike not come to a quick end is not entirely clear. Colonel Wedgwood, who had no departmental responsibilities and was not connected with a trade union, was given the uncongenial job of Chief Civil Commissioner, in charge of co-ordinating the Government's efforts to prevent hardship resulting from the strike, or any subsequent strikes. Tom Dickson, M.P., probably relying somewhat on his Clydeside imagination, reported that the Government had told the employers that it would take over the docks, give the men their wage demands, and offer "no guarantee that the business would ever go back to the exploitation called 'Private Enterprise'." On the other hand, Arthur Creech-Jones, who was then National Secretary of the union, recalls a letter from Wedgwood to the Transport Workers, warning that the military would be used to keep food supplies moving if the strike continued. And Ernest Bevin is quoted as having said, after the strike, "I only wish it had been a Tory Government in office. We would not have been frightened by *their* threats. But we were put in the position of having to listen to the appeal of our own people."[22]

A London tram workers' strike, beginning 21 March, posed new problems. A Court of Inquiry produced an interim report on the 24th, in which the men's claim to a wage increase was "not seriously questioned", but it was stated that the industry as constituted could not afford to pay it. A rise in fares, all parties agreed, was no answer. The only road to a solution, concluded

the report, was for the Government to introduce legislation co-ordinating the passenger traffic of the metropolitan area. Harry Gosling, Minister of Transport, announced that the Government was taking up the suggestion, but on the 26th the extension of the strike to the tubes was announced for two days hence. With London now populated by "wet and weary walkers", a Cabinet Committee, under Wedgwood, was set up to consider possible Government action under the Emergency Powers Act, which Labour had fought so hard in the days of Lloyd George, to have the armed forces operate lorries as a substitute form of transport in the capital. Signs of stress within the Labour movement increased when a joint committee of the TUC General Council and the Labour Party Executive published a resolution deploring the Government's intention of using the Emergency Powers Act, and urging instead the acceptance of the Executive's proposals that the Government take over all London transport, pay the men the new wage, and make up any deficit by means of a subsidy. With Bevin asserting that the strike had only been limited to trams and buses during the first week at the special request of the Government, tension between the Ministry and its supporters had thus reached a high point.[23]

Conferences with the parties, begun by MacDonald on the 27th, continued through the night, and produced a compromise settlement the next day. On the basis of the Government's London Transport Bill, hurriedly introduced in the Commons on the 28th, the employers felt able to grant a substantial part of the wage demands, and the men accepted their offer. But the situation had been ugly, and the Bill which made a solution possible was no great credit to the Ministry.*

Several other disputes arose to bedevil the Labour Government's existence. A National stoppage in the building trades, caused by a local difficulty at Liverpool, was only brought to an end after more than six weeks, with another Court of Inquiry set up by the Government, considerable friction between Ministers and the union leadership, and some exceedingly complex negotiations organized by the Minister of Labour.[24] A

*See below, p. 226.

shipyard strike that began in February at Southampton blossomed into a National lockout in April; finally the TUC stepped in and persuaded the Southampton men to settle on terms that had been available to them all along.[25] The last strike to reach the headlines during the Government's career had a similarly inglorious ending for the employees: Covent Garden Market porters lost out in a five-week struggle in which a Court of Inquiry decided largely in favour of the management.[26]

Opponents maintained that the advent of the Labour Government had made for increased industrial unrest. The statistics for the year show no very startling change either way. More strikes began in 1924 than in either of the two previous years—but less than half as many as in 1920. The number of workpeople involved in these strikes showed a similar pattern—more than 10 per cent above 1922, some 50 per cent above 1923, but less than a third the number involved in disputes beginning in 1920 or 1921, less than a fourth the total for 1919. When the aggregate duration of strikes in being during 1924 (regardless of date of origin) is examined, the total is seen to be the lowest for any year since 1918, and lower by a third than the yearly average since 1893. But there was an unusually large number of strikes involving 5,000 or more workers. These are the strikes that make the headlines, and thirteen of them began in 1924, as against nine in 1923, seven in 1922, and only eleven even in 1921. But 1919 had fifty-two such disputes, 1918 had thirty, and 1920 had twenty-six.[27]

Actually, the pattern of strikes from 1918 through 1924 can be accounted for more satisfactorily by reference to the state of trade and employment than by analysing the political complexion of each year. Nevertheless, there were undoubtedly many who agreed with *The Times* that trade unionists were moved to strike because they felt their chances of success to be greater under a Labour Government, and because of "a curiously exaggerated idea of the necessity for asserting the independence of Labour as industrially organized from Labour as politically organized".[28]

The latter motive may, in fact, have played a role in one or two of the 1924 disturbances. The Communists in particular

lost no opportunity for making embarrassing trouble. Their main coup was a stoppage in the London tubes in June. This unofficial strike, by a few men in key positions to affect the operation of the trains, led C. T. Cramp, of the NUR, to denounce the "underground movement" that had brought about such "a fight between order and mob law".[29] The Communists took part in other disputes, including the stubborn Southampton shipyard strike and a brief flare-up that threatened for a time to delay the opening of the Empire Exhibition at Wembley. But the net effect of their activities may well have been to push the orthodox trade union leaders into more unequivocal support of the Government, and to discredit industrial action that might embarrass it.

The coming of the Labour Government caused no marked increase in strikes; neither did it bring much change in techniques for dealing with strikes. Some successes could be claimed; a major coal stoppage had been averted by the unceasing efforts of the Secretary for Mines, Emanuel Shinwell, and the good work done by a Court of Inquiry; Haldane thought that the presence of influential trade union leaders in the Government had speeded the settlement of several important strikes.[30] But the mainstay remained the Court of Inquiry, under the Industrial Courts Act of 1919; the personnel of these Courts retained the traditional pattern: one employer, one trade unionist, and a K.C. Announcements by Ministers that the Government would protect men who stayed at work and that essential services would be maintained, the appointment of Colonel Wedgwood, the apparent readiness to have recourse to the Emergency Powers Act—with all this it is not surprising that "considerable feeling" was reported from the 1925 TUC "that in industrial matters the Labour Party does not, or at any rate, did not during its term of office, sufficiently represent the Unions".[31]

Yet there were few public complaints from the trade unionists, who generally confined themselves to reminding the party that industrial action remained important and must not be subordinated to politics. There was stronger, and as usual more articulate, reaction to the Government's experience on the part of the socialist intellectuals of the ILP. The *New Leader*

pondered the lack of proportion between means and ends in most strikes; the tram strikes, for instance, "would have been adequate to stopping a Fascist *coup d'état*". Instead it was invoked merely to support the wage demand of some 17,000 men —and just incidentally "weakened the political power and influence . . . of four or five million" in the process. Among several articles critical of the unions was one by Ernest Hunter, describing the 1924 TUC as dull, lethargic, and generally incapable of overcoming the parochialism that held it back from constructive partnership in creating the new socialist order. The only response to this last was a public bellow of outrage from the TUC General Secretary against the "intolerable conceit of the superior person" who would thus dare to criticize the unions from outside.[32]

The Government's record in labour relations, then, was a disappointment to some trade unionists, who undoubtedly hoped that somehow a Labour Government would smoothe the way to greater industrial triumphs by tipping the scales in favour of the strikers. The socialists of the ILP, on the other hand, were moved to weigh more earnestly the problems of reconciling trade union liberties with socialist self-restraints. And the more conservative members of the Government were more convinced than ever that strikes were a social evil. In the preface to the 1924 edition of his *Socialism: Critical and Constructive*, MacDonald wrote: "It cannot be over-emphasized that public doles, Poplarism, strikes for increased wages, limitation of output, not only are not Socialism but may mislead the spirit and the policy of the Socialist movement."[33] No doubt he, like Snowden, had grounds for resentment at strikes which "caused the Government great anxiety, and diverted its attention in a large measure from the work of preparing its legislative measures, in which it should have been wholly occupied".*

The dilemma of industrial disputes under a Labour Government would have been much more acute had there been

*Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 635. Henderson even told Webb that the strikes reminded him of those that undermined the Kerensky régime in 1917 in Russia. *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1956), p. 18 (3 Apr. 1924).

nationalized industries involved. But nowhere was the 1924 Government farther from being ready to carry out a socialist programme than in the matter of nationalization. Its unreadiness was concealed by its minority position: no one expected much progress towards public ownership with an anti-socialist majority in the House of Commons. At that there were occasions on which the Government's policy on the matter was called into question, if not exactly tested.

For the coal mines, long the primary target of Labour's nationalization campaign, the able Mines Secretary, Shinwell, adopted a two-fold programme: he worked energetically for limited, practical reforms and improvements in the industry, while continuing to uphold the idea of nationalization at the first opportune moment. Little was done to prepare for this moment; the Secretary was kept busy warding off a coal strike and carrying out immediate projects. No approaches were made to the Liberals with an eye to working out a major reform in coal.[34]

In May, the Government made a concession to the strong sentiment in the party by giving Parliamentary time to a nationalization bill introduced by a private Member acting for the MFGB. Shinwell spoke effectively in support of the principle of nationalization, but said very little about the particular bill in question. Lloyd George, pouncing on the scheme as "the first concrete example" of what Labour would do if it won a majority, then proceeded to show how it gave great power to the Miners' Federation while failing to protect the public interest.* The Bill failed of a Second Reading by 264 to 168, and even the *New Leader* admitted later than it contained "crudities . . . which were far from reflecting the considered mind of the party or the real intentions of the Government".[35]

July saw the publication of Lloyd George's own scheme for a solution to the coal problem short of nationalization.† The Labour movement was quick to condemn Lloyd George, all his

*Ten of the twenty-one members of the proposed managing board would have been MFGB nominees, subject to arbitrary recall by the union at any time.

†*Coal and Power* (London, 1924). See above, Ch. IX, p. 140.

works, and any future works that might bear his name. But in these denunciations of "the wily Welsh wizard" and his readiness to steal a march on Labour there was a new note of urgency concerning the party's need for a strong nationalization policy.[36] A Joint Committee representing the TUC General Council, the Labour Party Executive, the Parliamentary Labour Party, and the MFGB, was created to draw up a nationalization scheme for the mines, and its report, which formed the basis of Labour's testimony before the Samuel Commission, was somewhat more realistic than the 1924 Bill. But the MFGB Executive still talked in 1925 as if the problem were entirely one of educating other people rather than one of developing a policy, despite the fact that a poll of MFGB members that year showed a very divided opinion concerning so basic a question as whether or not the owners of mineral rights should be compensated when nationalization came.[37]

Public ownership of the railways was not even dignified by a private Bill in 1924. Evidence abounds that the most interested groups, the railway trade unions, had not as yet a matured plan. At the Railway Clerks Association Annual Meeting, a workers' control amendment to the nationalization resolution was only defeated by 884 to 876. At the giant NUR's Annual Conference, there was fierce debate over whether or not to approve the amalgamation of the railways into four big companies, as a step towards nationalization. The NUR Executive was instructed to draw up a bill for nationalization, but C. T. Cramp, the General Secretary, indicated that much preparation remained to be done. "Workers' control cannot come before the workers have qualified themselves for the responsibilities they propose to assume," he said. "That task is not one that lends itself to declamation. Let us devote more time and study to educating our young men to the necessity of being ready to run industry. . . ."[38]

Of more direct concern to the Government, because it was becoming an issue of practical politics by July of 1924, was the question of the role of public ownership in the forthcoming programme of electric power development. Snowden dodged questions in the House of Commons as to who would own the

main transmission lines when they were built, and Herbert Morrison expressed grave concern lest the Government fail to link public control with its development projects.[39] Morrison was again involved in the episode of the London Traffic Bill. Brought before Parliament under the shadow of the tram strike, this measure was admittedly the child of the previous Government, save in "one or two details". It was severely criticized by the Liberals and some dissident Labourites on the ground that it favoured unduly the private transport interests and slighted the municipal authorities. Morrison quoted a Labour Party Executive resolution of the previous year, opposing this same Bill when it was presented by a Tory Government. In Committee, a crucial amendment on behalf of the municipal authorities failed by two votes, beaten by what one Liberal scornfully called "the alliance between the official Conservative Party and the official Socialist Party".[40]

Defenders of the Government could argue that the London traffic crisis had been a sudden emergency, and that no better bill was possible until the local authorities came to some agreement on the problem. No such defence was available when the Government undertook to sell properties already in its possession which might have been put to good use as Government enterprises. Such a case was the Gretna auction. The site of an ambitious industrial development in the days of the war, Gretna had since fallen into disrepair, and odd bits of equipment had been sold. Under the Labour Government, more of the property was auctioned, some of it at very low prices. The Scottish socialist delegation in Parliament was outraged; too late, Snowden announced "a thorough investigation as to whether it is possible to use any property for Government schemes" before further sales were made.[41]

It would be a mistake to read great significance into the few slight brushes that the first Labour Government had with the question of public ownership. No one had expected to hold office so soon; once in office, Ministers were overwhelmed with immediately pressing business, and had no time for policy development. The most that can be said is that the Government's experience caused some of its followers to ponder more

seriously the problems involved in nationalization. At the Scottish TUC in April 1924, the disputes and rivalries among trade unions were cited as obstacles to nationalization. At the ILP Summer School in August, William Graham worried out loud over the problem of meeting wage demands in nationalized industries; if recent wage demands at the Mint had been met, valuable foreign and private contracts would have been lost. After the Government's fall, the *Socialist Review* reflected upon the increased knowledge of the technical processes of production and marketing that Labour would have to acquire to make nationalization a success.[42]

Some critics, notably Clifford Allen, Chairman of the ILP, deplored the fact that the Cabinet had not put its control of the Goverment machinery to work filling the gaps in Labour's programme, laying the foundations for later nationalization by setting up administrative inquiries into the application of socialism to key industries.[43] And yet at times it must have seemed to harassed Ministers as if they had quite enough to do merely to stay afloat in the troubled waters of minority government, without being asked to make much headway towards the far shore of socialism.

NOTES

[1]National Joint Council, *Labour's Great Record* (London, 1924), p. 16.
[2]Susan Lawrence, *The New Spirit in Education*, ♯ 2 in "Can Labour Rule?" series (London, 1924), p. 5; C. P. Trevelyan in *Labour Magazine*, Mar. 1924, pp. 486–7.
[3]P. C. Hoffman, M.P., in TUC *Annual Report, 1924*, pp. 419–20.
[4]Philip Snowden, *Autobiography* (London, 1934), II, 622–3; 169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1971–2.
[5]169 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1971, 2114–56 (21 Feb. 1924); 171: 325–402 (18 Mar. 1924); *Labour Magazine*, Apr. 1924, p. 559.
[6]*The Times*, 5 Mar. 1924; *Labour Magazine*, Apr. 1924, p. 559, and May 1924, p. 30.
[7]Sir Frederick Maurice, *Life of Viscount Haldane*, Vol. II, *Haldane 1915–28* (London, 1939), pp. 145–9, 154 and 158–60.
[8]*The Times*, 22 Feb. 1924.
[9]ibid., 27 Feb. 1924; *Forward*, 8 Mar. 1924; ILP *Report, 1924*, pp. 114–16.
[10]*The Times*, 24 Jan. 1924; *New Leader*, 31 Oct. 1924, pp. 2–3.

[11]*Daily Telegraph*, 19 Jan. 1924, and *Manchester Guardian*, 25 Jan. 1924, for reports of Indian reactions.
[12]*The Times*, 27 Feb. 1924.
[13]*Socialist Review*, Nov. 1924, p. 196; *New Leader*, 31 Oct. 1924, pp. 2–3.
[14]See *Daily Herald*, esp. 15 July and 11, 13 and 14 Aug. 1924. The quotation is from *Queen Mab*, and should read "desolating pestilence".
[15]TUC *Report*, *1925*, pp. 553–5.
[16]*The Times*, 19 June, 8 Mar. and 16 May 1924.
[17]Dr. L. Haden-Guest, *Where Is Labour Going?* (London, 1927), pp. 138–9; *Forward*, 26 July 1924.
[18]TUC *Report*, *1924*, pp. 185–9; Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference*, *1924*, pp. 140–1; *Railway Review*, 18 Apr. 1924, p. 1, and 18 July 1924, p. 3.
[19]Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference*, *1924*, pp. 67–69.
[20]*The Times*, 28 Jan. 1924. For resignations from union posts, see Party Conference *Report*, *1924*, p. 64.
[21]See *The Times*, 19 through 29 Jan. 1924. For MacDonald's anger at the strike, see Sir Norman Angell, *After All* (London, 1951), pp. 243–4.
[22]*The Times*, 20 Feb. 1924; *Forward*, 1 Mar. 1924; interview with the Rt. Hon. Arthur Creech-Jones, 7 July 1952; Francis Williams, *Ernest Bevin* (London, 1952), p. 122. For hatred between Bevin and MacDonald, see W. J. Brown, *So Far . . .* (London, 1943), pp. 132–3.
[23]See *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, Apr. 1924, pp. 121–2, and *The Times*, 20 Mar.–1 Apr. 1924.
[24]See *Daily Herald*, 14 July 1924, and *Min. Lab. Gazette*, Aug. 1924, p. 278.
[25]*Min. Lab. Gazette*, May 1924, pp. 157–8.
[26]ibid., Sept. 1924, p. 319.
[27]ibid., July 1925, p. 230.
[28]*The Times*, 24 Mar. 1924.
[29]ibid., 12 June 1924.
[30]Maurice, *Haldane*, II, 153; Emanuel Shinwell, *Conflict Without Malice* (London, 1955), p. 93.
[31]*Forward*, 12 Sept. 1925.
[32]*New Leader*, 4 Apr. 1924, p. 2 and 5 Sept. 1924, p. 8; TUC *Report*, *1924*, p. 465.
[33]For the embarrassment this caused the movement, see *Annual Register*, *1924*, pp. 99–100.
[34]TUC General Council, *Reports of Deputations to Ministers*, *1924*, p. 17; Rt. Hon. Emanuel Shinwell, interview with the author, 27 May 1952.

[35]173 H.C. Deb. 5 s., 1715–94; *New Leader*, 22 Aug. 1924, p. 2.
[36]For Labour reactions, see reports of Durham Miners' Gala in *Daily Herald*, 21 July 1924, and A. J. Cook in TUC *Report*, *1924*, p. 361.
[37]See Labour Party Conference *Report*, *1926*, pp. 35–38, and Miners' Federation of Great Britain, *Annual Volume of Proceedings . . . 1925*, pp. 596–8.
[38]*Daily Herald*, 14 May 1924; *The Times*, 11 July 1924.
[39]176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2108–9, 2157–66.
[40]171 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1697–1782 (28 Mar. 1924); *The Times*, 9 Apr. 1924.
[41]*Forward*, 2, 9 and 16 Aug. 1924; 176 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 2744 (5 Aug. 1924).
[42]*The Times*, 19 Apr. and 19 Aug. 1924; *Socialist Review*, Nov. 1924.
[43]See Allen's Chairman's Address to ILP Conference in 1925 (*Report*, p. 88).

XIII

PROBLEMS OF MINORITY GOVERNMENT

The great weaknesses of the first Labour Government were the obvious ones: the inexperience of its members, and its minority position in the House of Commons.

Experience seemed to bear little relation to success in administration, however. Clynes, among the more experienced, did badly; Wheatley, the neophyte, did so well that for a while Beatrice Webb thought him a possible rival to MacDonald for the party leadership.[1] No one of the trade unionists made a distinguished record as Minister, but neither did Lord Olivier or even Sidney Webb, much less poor Colonel Wedgwood, who was "almost completely lost to view".[2] The new Ministers seem generally to have got on well with their officials, however.[3] And some of them were strong men; an experienced and sober civil servant has called Snowden "the ideal of what a Minister should be", clear and decisive in matters of policy, yet careful not to meddle in matters of administration.[4]

Where inexperience did hurt was in the ability of Ministers to get the unfamiliar routine of their new offices under such control as to free them for effective planning of long-range policy. By the time MacDonald got through opening all mail marked "Private" or "Personal" himself, and answering the private telephone which he had installed in his room to avoid using the official one for his private calls, he was exhausted.[5] No wonder that he is to be found lamenting the difficulty of managing both to conduct the complex business of administration and "to retain enough leisure and enough freedom from the details of its responsibilities to survey the whole field, and to see how progress as an organic whole is being advanced".[6] Add to this the fact that the Labour programme contained "no real focusing point for action on any one thing because of the multitude of things to be attempted",[7] and it is not surprising

that the Government's policies were often neither very original nor very well co-ordinated.

The lack of a Parliamentary majority generally hampered the Government less than Labour apologists cared to admit, but it undoubtedly did increase the difficulty of managing Parliamentary business of any kind. Many Labourites hoped for a resurgence of the private Member, free from the shackles of Cabinet domination. Instead, the lack of a majority merely resulted in the unseemly spectacle of a Ministry having to plead, wrangle and manoeuvre for support in expediting its business by appropriating Parliamentary time. The Government was ill served on the technical side of Parliamentary management; MacDonald, with his double Ministerial load, had often to be absent, and Clynes made a weak Deputy Leader. Ben Spoor, the Chief Whip, was ill, and the other Labour Whips ineffectual; the nadir came in August when the Government suffered the rare humiliation of having the House "counted out" during the Second Reading of the Appropriations Bill.[8]

The Government, facing a hostile majority in Parliament, had need of disciplined backing from its own supporters. At the Ministerial level the record was good enough, although Snowden embarrassed the Government by publicly criticizing the Reparations settlement, by allowing reports of his coolness towards the Russian Treaties to pass uncontradicted, and, earlier, by publishing articles in the American *New Leader* which led to reports that MacDonald would ask Ministers to cease writing for periodical journals.[9] From Beatrice Webb's *Diaries* one gets the impression of a reasonably harmonious, though not especially friendly Cabinet, in which the Prime Minister stood "head and shoulders above the rest" of his colleagues, despite a tendency towards aloofness and inaccessibility. And Haldane has left a well-known tribute to MacDonald's conduct of Cabinet meetings, comparing it favourably with Asquith's before the war.[10]

But the Parliamentary Party contained more than its share of individualists and rebels, and much less than its share of experience. When the Clyde brigade had first descended on Westminster, opponents had noted their

> attitude of antagonism to Parliament itself. Some of these new Members address the whole house as a culprit, almost as an alien oppressor. Their manner of speech implies that they are themselves, not so much ordinary members of that assembly, as advance agents of a hitherto unrepresented public, carrying with them some special authority of a new and final order.[11]

These are the men who approached Sir Patrick Hastings, in the train that was taking them to Westminster for the first time in 1922, "to ask a most important legal question. If any of them were suspended by the Speaker, would his salary stop?"[12] And soon not one but four were suspended, for calling Sir Frederick Banbury a murderer. In 1924, one of them called L. S. Amery "a swine and a guttersnipe", and got punched on the jaw for it. Their attitude towards those of their colleagues who became Ministers is indicated by Kirkwood's comment on Wheatley: "He was a magnificent success as Minister of Health, but we felt that he had left us."[13]

Not all Clydesiders were irresponsible, and not all the Parliamentary Party were Clydesiders. There were always sober voices to recall the immense difficulties under which the new Ministers laboured.[14] Groups of M.P.s could send deputations to wait upon Ministers and urge their views, though the result was not always happy; MacDonald, resplendent in evening dress, asked the secretary of the ILP group, "Well, Brockway, what commands have you brought me today?" and then could not stay to hear the answer.[15] Beatrice Webb worked hard to organize a social life for Labour Members and their wives that would bring them closer together and at the same time immunize them against the aristocratic embrace. Some of the Left resisted this, apparently fearing that any such activity was debilitating to a true socialist.[16]

Ministers held a series of "at homes" in their Departments: over tea, Labour M.P.s met top civil servants, learned how the Department ran, and became better acquainted with the problems faced by the Minister. H. B. Lees-Smith lectured to the party's new M.P.s on Parliamentary procedure.[17] Most important, a new Executive Committee of the Parliamentary

Labour Party was created, with twelve members elected by the PLP and three chosen from the Government. This group was "to deal with questions of internal [party] administration, to act as a liaison body between the Government and the party, watch progress of business, advise members on various questions, and select the party's representatives for the various Select Committees and Standing Committees of the House."[18] Robert Smillie became Chairman, and was a tower of strength to the Government. But the rebellious spirits were well represented on the Committee.* This was probably a sign of the party's determination to keep a watchful eye on its Ministers, although of course it is good policy, in choosing such a liaison group, to put the rebels on it rather than leaving them to conduct guerilla warfare from outside. This Executive Committee drew attacks from the Opposition, under such headlines as "Governing the Government—A Labour Junta—Menace to Cabinet Authority"; more important, it sometimes failed to keep even its own members from embarrassing the Ministry. But no doubt these embarrassments would have been more frequent had the Committee not existed, and it is worth noting that on at least one of the worst occasions—the five cruiser episode—the Government had neglected to consult the Executive before announcing its policy to the House.[19]

The lack of cohesive discipline in both Labour and Liberal ranks became the crowning difficulty in the way of establishing any basis for co-operation between the two parties. The less moderate members of each were quick to suspect the imminent betrayal of the party by its leaders into the hands of the other. And to the older differences of viewpoint within each party were now added differences as to how, in the existing delicate situation, to deal with the rival party.

Neither side began this difficult experiment in tacit co-operation very realistically. The offensiveness to Labour of Asquith's "It is we who govern" has been noted.† Behind the Liberal leader's surface assurance lay the deep fissures of his

*Including Lansbury, Wallhead, Maxton, T. Johnston, plus others not entirely submissive, such as Susan Lawrence.

†See above, Ch. VI, p. 86.

party—some the expression of basic differences in philosophy, some the inevitable difference between the Liberal who has won his seat by fighting, with the local support of Labour, against the Tories, and the one who has beaten a Labour opponent, with the aid of Conservative votes.[20] The Liberals were thus able to co-operate fully neither with the Government nor the Opposition, although there was a group within the Liberal Party in favour of each of these courses. While these groups fought for control of the party, the only thing left to do was to shun the embraces of both rivals. This was accomplished by repeated declarations of Liberal independence, and by criticizing the Government severely while exercising great care not to vote it out of office. The party thus put itself in a position from which it could scarcely share credit for the Government's successes, yet could not avoid incurring responsibility for its failures.

Labour, too, was jealous of its independence. Colonel Wedgwood, not the most influential member of the Cabinet, seems to have been the only one to plead publicly that Labour in Parliament do nothing to make co-operation with the Liberals difficult.[21] Collaboration to achieve those ends upon which the two parties were agreed was seldom advocated by Labourites. Probably the considerable breadth of agreement between the two electoral programmes was a positive hindrance; Labourites preferred to stress the unbridgeable gap between the party of socialism and *any* capitalist party. The fact that this socialist party had taken office with the certain knowledge that it could do nothing socialistic because of its minority position seems to have made little difference. Labour, like the Liberals, contained conflicting groups, some favouring an uncompromising socialist policy, purposely courting defeat in Parliament; some wishing to co-operate with the Liberals for the sake of accomplishing a limited, practical programme. As with the Liberals, the result was a compromise that perhaps made little sense from either viewpoint: the Government kept its policy very moderate to avoid antagonizing the Liberals, but made little or no effort to co-operate positively with them. Instead, the pretence was elaborately maintained that the Government was simply pro-

ceeding according to its own best lights, treating Tories and Liberals exactly alike and expecting special favours from neither.[22]

If Labour's aim was to accomplish as much as possible while in office, this was no way to achieve it. Properly carried out, however, the Government's policy might have been politically effective, by sharpening the horns of the Liberal dilemma. But too often Labour's proposals fell far short of what could reasonably be expected—and publicly demanded—of the Liberals. MacDonald had foreseen the possibility of being outflanked on the Left by the Liberals.[23] But the Cabinet did not pursue with consistency the policy which would seem to derive logically from this foresight—that of making a clearly directed effort to detach from the Liberal Party those Radicals to whom an advanced programme of social legislation and a bold attack on unemployment would have been most appealing.

From the beginning, relations between the Government and the Liberals were strained. On the eve of taking office, MacDonald attacked them bitterly. And when he described the Baldwin Government, which had not resigned, as "a corpse waiting for a coffin", newspaper accounts made out that he had applied this metaphor to the Liberal Party, thus adding to the bad feeling.[24] A few Liberal leaders waxed optimistic about the chances of good work by "the forces of progress",[25] but from the start there was a "Cave" of some ten Liberal M.P.s who voted with the Tories—a nucleus around which opposition to the Government could form.

Such opposition did not grow steadily through the succeeding months. Churchill's support of the Conservative candidate in the Burnley by-election in late February caused no great stir in the party from which he thus began to extricate himself. But a month later, a meeting of the Liberal Parliamentary Party complained officially about Labourite attacks in the constituencies. Through most of April, this bitterness grew; Lloyd George led the attack with an angry speech to the Liberal M.P.s on the 15th, and a major public address at Llanfairfechan on the 22nd, in which he developed a metaphor soon famous: "Liberals are to be the oxen to drag the Labour wain

over the rough roads of Parliament for two or three years, goaded along, and at the end of the journey, when there is no further use for them, they are to be slaughtered. That is the Labour idea of co-operation."[26]

Snowden's Budget seemed for a while to have wiped out this resentment, by fulfilling Liberal fiscal hopes to perfection. The defeat of a Proportional Representation Bill for lack of Labour support brought a return of bad feeling, but at the Annual Meeting of the National Liberal Federation in late May there was no sign of an impending breach with the Government. Lloyd George attacked the Tories as well as Labour; Lord Grey praised the Government's foreign policy and reiterated his approval of the Liberals' decision to put Labour in office.[27]

The Liberals had good reason for not pursuing the campaign of complaint at this time. Until they were ready to challenge the Government flatly and face a General Election, there was real danger that an outcry against Labour's ill treatment of the party would seem like undignified whining—"grovelling for consultation by the Socialist Government", the Chairman of the Conservative Party organization called it.[28]

Besides, the question of Liberal strategy was enmeshed in the struggle for control of the party. Asquith's weary fatalism blended ill with Lloyd George's fierce "determination not to lose the future" to the Labour Party.[29] The Welshman was temperamentally ill-suited, both to the subsidiary role of faithful lieutenant, and to patient acceptance by the Liberals of responsibility without the power of initiative. Whether or not he consciously plotted Asquith's downfall,* Lloyd George easily became the spokesman for the party dissidents. As early as April, Sir Robert Thomas, M.P., told a meeting in Wales: "If you are not satisfied with the Liberal leadership today, remember this: Our great fellow-countryman is submerging his personality at the present time, and he is loyal to the man who has been appointed leader of the Party. We are as certain as the sun will

*Shinwell unkindly suggested that Lloyd George wanted a General Election because he knew that his Leader's hold on the Paisley seat was shaky (*The Times*, 15 Sept. 1924).

rise tomorrow to be led and led well before we are very much older."[30] But it was not until the Government presented him with a convenient issue, the Russian Treaties, that Lloyd George's campaign could be resumed with a real chance of success. How he brought his party around to his point of view on this issue has been described.* But the final crisis in Liberal-Labour relations was to come, not over the Treaties, but over what soon became known as the Campbell case.

On 25 July 1924 there appeared in the *Workers' Weekly*, British Communist organ and ancestor of the *Daily Worker*, an article exhorting soldiers to "let it be known that, neither in the class war nor in a military war, will you turn your guns on your fellow workers." Such sentiments, from such a source, caused little excitement at first. But on 6 August, the same day that the Russian Treaties were being patched up, the obscure fulminations of the *Workers' Weekly* began to be transformed into a *cause célèbre*. In answer to questions, the Attorney General, Sir Patrick Hastings, announced that the Government was prosecuting the editor of the paper under the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1795. To Sir Patrick's intense surprise, a storm of angry questions arose from Labour benches. Maxton said that the article in question "contains mainly a call to the troops not to allow themselves to be used in industrial disputes". Dickson said that if sentiments such as those in the article were to become cause for prosecution, the Government would find half its party in the dock.[31]

After this brief flurry, the summer Adjournment intervened. On 13 August, however, the Government abandoned the prosecution of the editor, by now identified as J. R. Campbell.† In so doing, Treasury Counsel stated in court:

> It has been represented that the object and intention of the article in question was not an endeavour to seduce men in the fighting forces from their duty . . . but it was a comment upon armed military force being used by the State to repress industrial disputes. . . .

*See Ch. XI, pp. 199–204, above.

†Campbell lived to fight another day; he stood as Communist candidate against Churchill in the 1951 election.

> It has been possible for the Director of Public Prosecutions to accept that alleged intention of this article more easily because the defendant is a man of excellent character with an admirable military record.[32]

There were newspaper comments on this, but it was largely overshadowed by the Russian Treaty furor until Parliament met, in a special session to deal with the Irish boundary dispute, at the end of September. This time it was the Tories' turn to bombard the Attorney General. How had the prosecution come to be dropped? Who had made the representations to which Treasury Counsel had referred? Sir Patrick stated flatly that no one had attempted to influence his decision in the matter. The representations were those made by Labour M.P.s in the House on 6 August. The prosecution had been dropped when Hastings learned that Campbell had been maimed for life in the war, and decorated for bravery, that he was merely the acting editor of the paper, and that editorial policy was controlled by a Political Bureau anyhow. Under supplementary questioning, he added that the Communists simply wanted to make a martyr out of Campbell.[33]

Also on 30 September, the Prime Minister said, in answer to a Parliamentary question:

> I was not consulted regarding either the institution or the subsequent withdrawal of these proceedings. The first notice of the prosecution which came to my knowledge was in the Press. I never advised its withdrawal, but left the whole matter to the discretion of the Law Officers, where that discretion properly rests.[34]

He also repudiated the suggestion that he had acted to quash the proceedings out of fear that the Communists would call him as a witness, with the intention of confronting him with seditious utterances from his own past.

When Baldwin asked for a Debate on the matter, MacDonald would not wait for the reconvening of Parliament in late October, but scheduled it for 8 October, during the special session. There ensued a hectic week in which the parties manoeuvred for position. On 1 October, at the same meeting

at which the Liberal M.P.s decided to oppose the Russian Treaties, Asquith said that his party would support "a reasonable motion" on the Campbell case. It was thought that this might mean censure, not of the Government, but of the Attorney General alone. Sir Patrick later maintained that MacDonald suggested some such sacrifice.* But Sir Henry Slesser, the Solicitor General, discouraged any Liberals who might have hoped to avert a crisis by this means, stating publicly on 2 October that the Government would stand by the Attorney General.[35]

By the 3rd, it was clear that the Tories would move a vote of censure on the Government; the Liberals would move an amendment calling for a Select Committee investigation, instead. But report had it that the Tories would then turn around and support the Liberal amendment, thus forcing the Government either to swallow a major humiliation or dissolve Parliament.† The Communists added their bit by vehemently denying the validity of all the Attorney General's excuses for having withdrawn the prosecution.[36]

The Liberals' dilemma was now acute. To eject the Government on the Russian issue was one thing; to do so over a relatively specialized question such as the Campbell case was another matter. The prospect of appealing to Liberal voters on an issue in which the Labour Party could make it seem that Liberal M.P.s were persecuting a disabled veteran and trying to interfere with free speech was not attractive.[37] Yet, having adopted the demand for an investigation, the Liberals could not very well abandon it simply because the Tories had come

*The suggestion allegedly was that Hastings should resign, then stand in a by-election in which all the Cabinet would show their faith in him by speaking in his constituency. At this J. H. Thomas is said to have exclaimed, "Mac, that's a damned dirty trick", after which MacDonald hastily apologized; Hastings, *Autobiography* (London, 1948), pp. 241–2. It should be pointed out, however, that Hastings's book contains glaring errors of fact on some other matters.

†Lord Swinton (then Sir Philip Lloyd-Graeme) says that he and Edward Wood (later Lord Halifax) persuaded Baldwin to do this; *I Remember* (London, 1948), p. 158. According to M. A. Hamilton, *J. Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1929), p. 234, basing her account on writings of Lord Beaverbrook in his *Sunday Express* (n.d.), it was Lloyd George, Birkenhead and Hoare who did the persuading.

around to their view. Besides, Liberal M.P.s were frustrated and impatient; it had taken time and Asquithian pleading even to make them accept a committee of inquiry rather than outright censure.[38] For many Liberals, the revelation of Tory strategy left only a dwindling hope that the Labour Government would somehow manage to accommodate itself to an investigation, and so avoid a crisis. As this hope diminished, Liberals grew more and more bitter against the Government, until in the end those who voted against it without conviction could at least do so with animus.[39]

Labour, on the other hand, welcomed the fight. This is worth stressing, for it is often maintained that MacDonald brought on the Campbell crisis himself, either because he was worn out and wished for "a General Election as a way of escape from his troubles", or because the imputations of the Opposition were "a personal humiliation, the one thought he could not tolerate".[40] No doubt he was weary and overwrought. He had recently had to fight off charges of corruption arising from his acceptance from Sir Alexander Grant, a wealthy biscuit manufacturer and a childhood friend, of a limousine, together with a fund to cover its operating expenses. Since Grant had just received his Baronetcy, as a reward for philanthropy of a more public kind, a good deal of innuendo about selling honours was inevitable, although apparently the only sin involved was that of naïveté. After this, hecklers could discomfit the sensitive MacDonald simply by shouting, "Biscuits!" in the middle of a meeting.[41] This, coming after months of serious overwork as the mainstay of the Ministry, was enough to make him nervous and irritable. On 24 September Mrs. Webb reports his telling the Cabinet that he was " 'sick of it'," and thought the party, with its dissensions and its criticisms, not " 'fit to govern' ".[42]

But to those who accuse him of precipitate haste in accepting the Tory challenge, or even of plotting the overthrow of his own Government,[43] it must be remarked that the Labour Party would scarcely have tolerated any temporizing or delay. The Clydesider, Dickson, wrote concerning the Prime Minister's insistence upon immediate debate: "Never have I seen MacDonald put in so sure a stroke. His Back-benchers cheered him

to the echo; they do not find apologetics to be pleasing fare." And the moderate P. C. Hoffman wrote in similar vein. The party's mood was one of pugnacity not unmixed with relief that the uneasy game of three-party politics was drawing to a close.[44]

The Cabinet's decision to fight both Liberal and Tory motions, and to dissolve Parliament if defeated, was taken on 7 October. Haldane "pressed hard" for this course, and MacDonald agreed.[45] That same day, the Prime Minister addressed a wildly cheering session of the party's Annual Conference, then meeting in London.* His speech contained no hint of compromise with the Liberal leadership, but made a strong bid instead for the support of conscientious individual Liberals, and even Conservatives:

> It remains to be seen if the inheritance of principle and tradition, which still retains for the Liberal Party the allegiance of many worthy people, is to regard small tactics as Liberal principle and partisanship as Liberal tradition. It also remains to be seen how the decently minded members of the Conservative Party will relish being made tools of in this kind of strategy by opponents whom they profess to hold in contempt.[46]

The fat would seem to have been squarely in the fire; the forthcoming debate should have been a mere formality. Yet it was not without event. To begin with, the Prime Minister felt called upon to make an explanation to the House: in flatly denying, on 30 September, that he had been consulted about the institution or withdrawal of proceedings against Campbell, he had gone "a little further than I ought to have gone". In just what respect he had exaggerated it was not clear. Under severe questioning, his answers were evasive. The gist of it all was that he had been overwhelmed with righteous anger at the suggestion that the threat of a subpoena had intimidated him; "It was simply the concentration of my personal resentment at

*"Delegates . . . were straining at the leash. When Mr. MacDonald released them for the fight, their pent-up feelings broke out in tumultuous delight and approval." M. A. Hamilton, *J. Ramsay MacDonald*, pp. 242–3. See also the *New Leader*, 10 Oct. 1924.

that gross imputation which made me for a moment forget that officially, and in conjunction with colleagues, the matter was talked about when no personal considerations were in our minds at all."[47] Far from clearing the air, this explanation "clarified nothing and it substituted for the merits and demerits of the Campbell case and the *Workers' Weekly* the far more exciting topic: whether anything the Prime Minister said about either was to be believed".*

Thus the Government began the debate at a sudden disadvantage. The score was soon evened, however, by Sir Patrick Hasting's factual, documented account of the affair, from the moment in which he had first approved the prosecution of the person or persons responsible for the article—all ignorant both of their identity and of the storm of disapproval which any such prosecution was bound to create among Labourites.[48]

It was the excitement at Question Time on 6 August that first aroused Hastings to more than routine interest, he said. Realizing immediately that several Members knew more about the case than he did, he called in Maxton and asked him for information. Maxton told him of Campbell's war record, and that he was only the temporary acting editor of the *Workers' Weekly*. These facts (which Sir Patrick checked officially) caused the Attorney General to think that the Government might lose the case, if it reached a jury, and that the prosecution should therefore be dropped.

That same afternoon there was a conference in the Prime Minister's room at the House of Commons. Hastings, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Assistant Director arrived before MacDonald, and began to discuss among themselves the possibility of dropping the case, perhaps on condition of an undertaking by Campbell to behave in the future. At this point, MacDonald arrived; he "took the view that the prosecution was ill-advised from the beginning", and began to blame the Director, but Hastings quickly shouldered the full responsi-

*L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman* (London, 1939), p. 351. MacDonald's performance in the debate later on has been criticized too (see Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 696), but Viscount D'Abernon, who heard it, thought him "dignified and impressive". *An Ambassador of Peace* (London, 1930), III, 104.

bility. According to the Director's statement, which Sir Patrick read out to the House, the Attorney General had then told MacDonald that "he had come to the conclusion that the prosecution ought to be withdrawn". The discussion appears then to have ended.

In the evening (6 August), there was a Cabinet meeting attended by Hastings. Cabinet proceedings could not be recounted, and Sir Patrick told the House, "All I can say is that I left that Cabinet meeting with a decision at which I had arrived interfered with by nobody." The following morning he told the Director of Public Prosecutions that he was dropping the case. When the withdrawal was formally made in court, Maxton's representations of 6 August, concerning the content of the offending article, were added to Sir Patrick's reasons. This was done at the suggestion of the Treasury Counsel, Travers Humphreys; there had been no illicit, back-stage pressure upon the Law Officers.

Sir Patrick's explanation, although it revealed the full inaccuracy of MacDonald's earlier claim that he was not consulted,* impressed the House, and especially the Liberals, greatly. The *Daily News* called it "far and away his best Parliamentary performance. . . . In the light of his explanation the idea of treating the Government's handling of the Campbell case as an excuse for a vote of censure is absurd." The *Manchester Guardian* defended the Attorney General's right to consult his colleagues on questions of "political expediency", and judged it "preposterous if for no better reason than this they should be driven from office".[49]

In the House, meanwhile, MacDonald made it clear that the Government would dissolve if the Liberal amendment were carried. But Asquith's contribution—his last speech in the Commons—indicated one final effort by the Liberals to avert this. He began by chiding the Prime Minister for preaching the Government's funeral oration before the patient was dead. The Liberals could not abandon the idea of an investigation, but he

*Hastings says that it was his warning to MacDonald that this discrepancy would be apparent that caused the Prime Minister to make his "explanation". Hastings, *Autobiography*, p. 242.

offered, on behalf of his party, to give up the places that would normally be assigned them on a Select Committee, for the sake of guaranteeing against political partiality in the inquiry.[50]

This was enough of an olive branch to induce the Cabinet to meet once more, while the debate was still in progress. All day long there had been rumours that a way out would be found. But the previous decision against compromise was confirmed. Hastings gave his view succinctly in Cabinet: "I merely said that I should tell them [the Opposition] to go to hell." The debate then ended with the defeat of the Government, 364 to 198. Fourteen Liberals and two Conservatives sided with the Ministry.[51]

The Liberals faced the Dissolution without enthusiasm. They could claim that the Labour Government, by rejecting all compromise, had willed its own demise; but would this sound as plausible to the voters as Labour's claim that it was all a Tory-Liberal plot?

Yet Labour, despite its high spirits, entered the contest from a rather weak position. For all the brilliance of his defence, Hastings had blundered in authorizing the prosecution without adequate grasp of the consequences. Furthermore, the withdrawal was badly done; the excuse that Campbell's article merely opposed the use of troops in an industrial dispute was ridiculous on the face of it.* Worst of all, perhaps, was that the Prime Minister had appeared in a bad light; his denial that he had been consulted was a blunder, and the plea that a Parliamentary Question, set down on the order paper in advance, had roused such shocked anger in his soul that he forgot all about his role in the case was a weak excuse—especially since the matter had certainly been on his mind: he had written about it to Lord Stamfordham, the King's Secretary, on 22 August: "There was a muddle somewhere, and I am making enquiries."[52] Indeed, the phrases in which MacDonald made his denial on 30 September show none of the incoherence of overpowering emotion; it is rather his explanation of 8 October that is obscure and meandering—no doubt the acute toothache from which he was suffering that night did not help.[53]

The question remains, however, as to whether the Campbell

*See the brief quotation from Campbell's article, above, p. 237.

case raised fundamental issues, important enough to justify precipitating a Government crisis. King George V, reluctantly granting the third Dissolution in less than three years, regretted that "the appeal to the electorate cannot be made upon a more vital issue".[54] But *The Times* of 8 October found lofty principles at stake: "the purity of the administration of justice and the equality of all before the law", rights which are "our proudest boast . . . the admiration and special envy of all other civilized peoples". The leader the next day, however, whittled it down to a relatively subtle distinction: while it was certainly justifiable for an Attorney General to consult his political colleagues about initiating a prosecution, he should never consult them concerning the withdrawal of one.

After the electorate had returned Stanley Baldwin to power, MacDonald asked him a Parliamentary Question relating to situations such as this; Baldwin replied that it was the Attorney General's duty "to inform himself of all relevant circumstances which might properly affect his decision: when the proposed prosecution is of such a character that matters of public policy are, or may be involved, it is the duty of the Attorney General to inform himself of the views of the Government or of the appropriate Minister before coming to a decision."*

Sir Patrick Hastings's crime, then, becomes a matter not of having dared to consult other Ministers about a prosecution, but of having failed to do so in time to avert the necessity of withdrawing a prosecution already under way. Unless an Attorney General is to be forbidden to rectify mistakes, and required instead to allow such errors to bring down the Government in which he serves, it is difficult to see in the Opposition's behaviour in the Campbell case anything other than what a lonely Tory dissident called "contemptible party tactics".[55]

*179 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 1214 (18 Dec. 1924). The Labour Government, it later appeared, had gone farther and instructed that no political prosecution should be undertaken without the Cabinet's sanction. The Baldwin Government excised this instruction. See *The Times*, 12 and 19 Dec. 1924.

NOTES

[1] *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1956), p. 11 (29 Feb. 1924), p. 39 (21 July 1924).

[2]*Daily News*, 13 Aug. 1924, an interesting article comparing performances of various Ministers.

[3]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, pp. 4, 9 and 18 (8 and 15 Feb., 31 Mar. 1924); *Annual Register, 1924*, p. 119.

[4]Sir Percy James Grigg, *Prejudice and Judgment* (London, 1948), p. 136.

[5]Nourah Waterhouse, *Private and Official* (London, 1942), pp. 296–7; Asquith to Mrs. Harrisson, 2 Feb. 1924, in *H.H.A., Letters of the Earl of Oxford and Asquith to a Friend*, 2nd series, 1922–7, ed. Desmond MacCarthy (London, 1934), p. 95; Lord Snell, *Men, Movements and Myself* (London, 1936), p. 253.

[6]Speech opening the new Parliamentary Labour Club. *The Times*, 17 May 1924.

[7]Margaret Bondfield, *A Life's Work* (London, 1948), p. 256.

[8]*The Times*, 6 Aug. 1924. See Frank Gray, *Confessions of a Candidate* (London, 1925), pp. 140, 143–4, and *B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, p. 13 (15 Mar. 1924).

[9]*The Times*, 17 Apr. 1924; *B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, p. 41 (30 Aug. 1924).

[10]*Diaries, 1924–32*, pp. 13, 28, 30, 31, 40 and 49–50; *Richard Burdon Haldane, An Autobiography* (New York, 1929), pp. 231–2, 348.

[11]*Liberal Magazine*, Jan. 1923, p. 2.

[12]Hastings, *Autobiography* (London, 1948), p. 228.

[13]David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt* (London, 1935), p. 220.

[14]See *Labour Magazine*, Apr. 1924, pp. 554–5; H. G. Romeril, M.P., in *Railway Clerks Association Journal*, May 1924, p. 132.

[15]A. Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left* (London, 1942), p. 152.

[16]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, Part One *passim*, esp. p. 10.

[17]See *Shop Assistant*, 17 May 1924, p. 400; F. W. Pethick-Lawrence, *Fate Has Been Kind* (London, 1943), p. 133.

[18]From account in the *Shop Assistant*, 23 Feb. 1924, p. 154.

[19]*The Times*, 27 Oct. 1924; ibid., 22 Feb. 1924. See also Lord Snell, *Men, Movements and Myself*, pp. 215–16.

[20]Gray, *Confessions of a Candidate*, pp. 144–5.

[21]*Staffordshire Sentinel*, 11 Feb. 1924.

[22]Philip Snowden, *Autobiography* (London, 1934), II, 631–2; *Labour Magazine*, May 1924, p. 25.

[23]See his article in the *Socialist Review*, Jan. 1924, pp. 1–15.

[24]*The Times*, 24 and 27 Dec. 1923.

[25]E.g. the Chief Liberal Whip, Vivian Phillipps, reported in *The Times*, 11 Feb. 1924.

[26]*The Times*, 25 Feb., 26 Mar., 16 and 23 Apr. 1924.

[27]ibid., 1–3 and 23 May 1924.

[28]ibid., 25 Apr. 1924.

[29]The phrase is Prof. Feiling's, *Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London,

1946), p. 94. For Asquith's mood, see *H.H.A., Letters of the Earl of Oxford*, esp. letter of 25 Nov. 1923 (pp. 84–85), describing the reunion with Lloyd George.

[30]*The Times*, 26 Apr. 1924.

[31]176 H. C. Deb., 5 s., 2928–30.

[32]Quoted in Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 692.

[33]177 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 8–12.

[34]ibid., 16.

[35]*The Times*, 2 and 3 Oct. 1924.

[36]ibid., 3 Oct. 1924.

[37]The *Liberal Magazine*, Sept. 1924, pp. 519–20, views the prosecution with distaste.

[38]*Westminster Gazette*, 3 Oct. 1924; J. A. Spender and C. Asquith, *Life of Herbert Henry Asquith* (London, 1932), II, 345; L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman* (London, 1939), p. 352.

[39]See esp. the *Westminster Gazette*, 8 Oct. 1924.

[40]Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 689, and Kirkwood, *My Life*, p. 223; see also Emanuel Shinwell, *Conflict Without Malice* (London, 1955), p. 96.

[41]See Snowden, *Autobiography*, II, 687–9; G. T. Garratt, *The Mugwumps and the Labour Party* (London, 1932), pp. 99–100; Waterhouse, *Private and Official*, pp. 297–9.

[42]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, p. 43.

[43]See Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, p. 261, and J. Paton, *Left Turn!* (London, 1936), p. 215.

[44]See *Forward*, 11 Oct. 1924; *Shop Assistant*, 18 Oct. 1924; *New Leader*, 3 Oct. 1924; *B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, p. 45 (10 Oct. 1924).

[45]Sir Frederick Maurice *Life of Viscount Haldane*, Vol. II, *Haldane 1915–28* (London, 1939), pp. 169–70.

[46]*Report of the Annual Conference*, 1924, p. 111.

[47]177 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 512–17.

[48]ibid., 596–619.

[49]*Daily News, Manchester Guardian*, 9 Oct. 1924.

[50]177 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 641–2.

[51]Hastings, *Autobiography*, pp. 246–7; 177 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 699–700.

[52]Sir Harold Nicolson, *King George V* (London, 1952), p. 398.

[53]*The Times*, 10 Oct. 1924.

[54]Nicolson, *King George V*, p. 400.

[55]Collingwood Hughes, M.P., statement publ. in *The Times*, 11 Oct. 1924.

XIV

THE ELECTION OF 1924

Red Letter Day

THE first Labour Government contested eight by-elections during its brief life, with somewhat inconclusive results:[1]

Constituency	*General Election, 1923**	*Date of By-election, 1924*	*By-election, 1924**
Burnley	Lab. 168 C. 142 L. 135	28 Feb.	Lab. 246 C. 175
Westminster: Abbey	C. unopposed	19 Mar.	C. 82 Anti-Socialist 81 Lab. 62 L. 3
Liverpool: W. Toxteth	C. 125 Lab. 123	22 May	Lab. 155 C. 130
Glasgow: Kelvingrove	C. 110 Ind. 100 L. 47	23 May	C. 155 Lab. 112 L. 14
Oxford	L. 123 C. 96	5 June	C. 101 L. 82 Lab. 28
Sussex: Lewes	C. 95 Lab. 64	9 July	C. 96 Lab. 61 L. 27

*Vote for each party, to nearest hundred.

Lincs.: Holland-with-Boston	Lab.	157	31 July	C.	129
	C.	133		Lab.	121
				L.	76
Carmarthen: West	L.	130	14 Aug.	L.	128
	C.	87		Lab.	84
	Lab.	71		C.	79

On balance, Labour had cause for restrained optimism. The greatest by-election triumph was Labour's at West Toxteth. Burnley was on the credit side, though circumstances favoured Labour there.* For Kelvingrove and Holland-with-Boston there were excuses: at the former, the Labour candidate was an avowed Communist, from whom official Labour recognition was withdrawn in mid-campaign;[2] at Holland there was a Liberal intervention, supported on the platform by eighteen M.P.s in the concluding week; the late Member's hold on the constituency had been partly a personal one, too.[3] Westminster Abbey, where Winston Churchill failed by a hair to dislodge Official Conservatism, and Fenner Brockway canvassed the backstairs servants at Buckingham Palace, was a moral victory for Labour.[4] At Carmarthen, the Labourite was the only one to increase his poll.

If there was one lesson in these results, it was that the Liberals were indeed in difficulties. Their train of disasters, including the humiliation of polling 1.3 per cent of the vote at Westminster Abbey, was unbroken, until Carmarthen. The fatal results of Sir Alfred Mond's victory there have already been noted.†

Most of these by-elections had been hard fought, and gave indications that the General Election of 1924 would not be distinguished by calm and sobriety. The fact that the battle was to be fought over the issue of Communism, in both the Campbell case and the Russian Treaties, completed the picture. The Opposition had its chance, of which it had hitherto been cheated by the Government's moderation, to link the Labour

*Arthur Henderson, the Home Secretary, was standing, and many felt that he and the new Government should be given a fair chance to prove themselves.

†See above, Ch. XI, p. 200.

Party once more with Red revolution.* The chance was not wasted.

Labour did its best to keep its traditional appeal on domestic issues from being overshadowed. This time that appeal was somewhat muted, however. Unemployment, so long a prime Labour talking point, now became a favourite subject of the Opposition. Labour's defences were pretty much what they had been all year, and not notably stronger, at that. The party's manifesto no longer boasted of having the "only remedy for unemployment"; its tone was subdued.[5] The ILP, on the other hand, went on talking as if unemployment were a problem in military organization.[6] Rhetoric still flowed easily; MacDonald offered the voters

> a rational experiment through the House of Commons, through your local councils or co-operative societies, through the Churches, through every organization interested in human well-being, laying their heads and experience together to devise the ways and means and organization by which men can co-operate to promote their mutual well-being and not merely to look after themselves and benefit themselves at the expense of other people. That was our fundamental position. That was what we meant when we said last year that the Labour Party alone knew a practical remedy for unemployment.[7]

Snowden's Budget bore its share, with its "most excellent effect on trade".[8] And there was some statistical hair-splitting; the gist of a Labour attack headed "Swat That Lie!" was that the Liberals, by using 11 February as a base instead of 28 January, made it appear that unemployment had grown under a Labour Government, whereas it had slightly declined.[9]

In housing, Labour had a legitimate boasting point in the Wheatley Act, and a black mark in the evictions failure. As so often in politics, the former was less of an asset than it deserved

*Tories had laboured mightily to make this moderation look dangerous. An article by Joynson-Hicks, in the *Weekly Dispatch*, 8 Sept. 1924, headed "Our Socialist Wasters", accused the Government of "conscienceless extravagance", and explained, "The extravagance and waste are not obvious, but that only makes them the more dangerous."

to be, and the latter less of a liability. Since the results of a major new housing programme do not appear immediately, it was possible for Conservatives to speak of the Wheatley scheme as a "typical example of a grandiose Labour failure". Labour, on the other hand, was able to gloss over the Government's mishandling of the evictions question, and put the blame on the Opposition for having rejected the Government-supported proposals.[10]

What has since seemed the Government's greatest success, its Western European policy, was also difficult to translate into quick political capital in 1924. Labour was on the defensive concerning the Dawes Plan, because of the movement's well established dislike of reparations.[11] The Geneva Protocol suffered from the technical nature of the problem, the coolness of many Labourites towards collective security supported by sanctions, and from opponents' attacks on it as a plan for "handing over the British navy to [an] outside authority". Usually the Protocol was praised in brief, general terms—"the recent triumph of Geneva". Often it was woven into the Labour theme of great works in progress, now interrupted by the Tory-Liberal alliance.[12]

Fortunately for Labour, its opponents were in a poor position to take advantage of these weaknesses. The Conservatives taunted Labour with having failed to cure unemployment. But the attack was hampered by the recentness of Tory failure in the same sphere, and by the fact that protection, the one remedy which Tories had called essential, was politically impossible. In mid-June, the party had declared that "Proposals for a general tariff will not again be submitted except upon clear evidence that on this matter public opinion is disposed to reconsider its judgment". Conservatives had thus to be content with such border-line suggestions as safeguarding of industries and restoration of the McKenna duties.[13]

On other domestic issues, the chief distinctive and positive notes in the Tory campaign were the promise of widows' pensions (also a feature of the Labour platform), an all-party conference on agriculture, and a Royal Commission to study food prices. The foreign affairs proposals were a judicious mixture

of platitudes and caveats, for instance, a bid for strengthening the League of Nations, countered by an implied threat to abandon the Geneva Protocol.

The Liberals, trying desperately to find a foothold on the increasingly slippery middle ground of politics, were in a far worse plight. They did their best to appear more progressive than Labour. The Liberals were pictured as having striven in vain to push the Government into "schemes of national development" to ease unemployment; Labour's attempts at social reform were castigated as "halting, ineffective, and unimaginative". The main ideas of Lloyd George's *Coal and Power* were included, as were electoral reform (nature unspecified) and a strong temperance plank.[14]

But the real problem for the Liberals was to keep clear of the Tory embrace. In constituencies where Liberals and Conservatives had straight fights, said *The Times*, ". . . one is conscious of being out of the main tide of the political controversy of the day."[15] Under a banner headline, the *Daily News* for 20 October tried gamely to chill its readers' blood with visions of the Lords' veto powers restored, naval armaments increased, and tariffs. This last was the one dependable rallying cry; citing the Tory manifesto's obvious effort to salvage what scraps it could of the tariff programme, Liberals gloomily predicted that the full programme would be unveiled, should Conservatives win a clear majority.

In general, Liberals found themselves hemmed in between the charge of abetting socialism by having put the Labour Government into office, and that of conniving with reactionaries to put it out again. The mere mechanics of the situation buffeted the Liberals this way and that. How was a good Liberal to vote in straight fights between Labour and Conservative? Were Liberals to abandon three-way fights where Liberalism could not hope to win? And if so, for whose benefit would it be done?

Lloyd George's paper, the *Chronicle*, argued for "mutual support" between Liberals and Tories, since Conservatism was "a less immediate danger than Labourism"; but no Liberal voter ought to consider voting for a Tory where there was a

Liberal candidate standing. The *Daily News* went even farther in the opposite direction, urging Liberals to "vote against Tory candidates without exception", and even suggesting that it was a Liberal's duty, in those "rare cases" where a vote for the Liberal candidate was clearly tantamount to a vote for letting in the Conservative, to vote for Labour.[16]

Of the two positions, the *Chronicle*'s was the easier to defend, given the fact that the Liberals had joined with the Conservatives to defeat the Government and bring about the election. Asked whom he would put into power if this election failed to change party relationships in the House, Asquith smiled and said, "Wait and see".[17] But the same logic that had made it impossible for the Liberals to collaborate with the Tories after the 1923 election now stood in the way of their co-operating with Labour.

There was furious controversy during the campaign as to whether or not there existed a nation-wide Tory-Liberal "pact" against Labour.[18] This was a futile debate; whatever formal arrangements there may or may not have been, Asquith gave his public blessing to the withdrawal of Liberal or Conservative candidates when their competition with each other "might have confused the issue, given to the Socialists a wholly delusory advantage, and in some cases even have enabled them, although a minority of the electors, to capture a seat to which on democratic principles they had no title".[19] And assuredly the advice was widely heeded. The Liberals abandoned 96 contests which had been three-way fights in 1923; in only 17 cases did Liberals intervene to create three-way fights in 1924. This stemmed partly from lack of money; bitterness between Lloyd Georgians and Asquithians was increased by the Wizard's stinginess and tardiness in making available the fabled riches of his fund.[20] Yet the analogous figures for the chronically impoverished Labour Party were only 8 abandonments, and 59 new interventions.

In vain did Asquith issue a statement, late in the campaign, to the effect that his party stood for Liberalism undiluted, and was "neither manoeuvring for position nor angling for votes by the abandonment of a single one of its characteristic beliefs".[21]

Liberal morale sagged anyhow. A. MacCallum Scott, a former Liberal Whip, wrote an open letter to Asquith during the campaign, of a kind usually reserved for the post mortems that follow upon electoral defeat. He attacked the strategy of forcing an election at that time and on the Campbell issue, and denounced the Liberals for appearing "as a mere blank negative to Socialism"; certainly, Labour had been unco-operative, but its purpose had been "to goad the Liberal Party into the arms of the Conservatives", and the Liberal leaders had obligingly fallen into the trap.[22] As an answer to this sort of defeatism, the *Chronicle*'s exhortations of 24 October were hardly reassuring: "No, the Liberal ship is in difficulties, but she is not sinking; and the right course for any self-respecting Liberal is to behave like a man and not a rat, to work her to harbour, not to desert her for other craft."

Adding to the gloom for many a Liberal was the realization that an election fought on the Russian issue was bound to be "a wild and embittered struggle, in which all the mud of ancient prejudices will be stirred up to confound counsel".[23] And so it proved to be. Labour's defence was often vigorous; the party literature on the treaties was hard-hitting and factual.[24] The loan continued to provide the most trouble; it was hard to say which was politically wiser, to brave it out, scorning even to point out that the loan was contingent upon future satisfaction of British demands,[25] or to stress the conditions and safeguards.[26] MacDonald's explanation of how he had changed his mind about a loan can scarcely have been convincing:

> In June the proposals put before me were proposals just to guarantee the loan of the Russian Government. They wanted to borrow money, and wanted us to guarantee it. I said, "Certainly not." What happened since? There was a steady evolution in the nature of the proposal that grew and grew, until in August it was this—that if Russia could borrow upon the market we would guarantee the loan it would borrow—not that we would give the loan, but if the Russian Government found, say, a million pounds on the London market free for investment in Russia and got the investment we would guarantee that sum.[27]

The debate was carried on in an atmosphere polluted by hysterical appeals, or appeals to hysteria, which carried it far beyond legitimate controversy over the wisdom or unwisdom of the Government's policy towards the Soviet Union. No doubt some of the failure of opposition candidates to distinguish between the Labour Party and the Communists was sincere enough, albeit obtuse. Many seem to have believed that Labour's mildness was traceable wholly to its minority position in Parliament; as *Blackwood's* had said earlier, ". . . it is helplessness alone which prevents them from undoing us."[28] And there was always the noisy minority in the Labour Party to lend a touch of reality to this view. But for those who cared to look, it was plain that the Communists were gaining no ground within the party. The Annual Conference, on the eve of the campaign, confirmed the party's refusal to accept the Communist Party's bid for affiliation, by a vote of 3,185,000 to 193,000. It then proceeded to declare individual Communists ineligible for endorsement as official Labour candidates (2,456,000 to 654,000) or even for Labour Party membership (1,804,000 to 1,540,000). On issues of policy, such as the programme of Wal Hannington's Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement, the story was the same: four-to-one defeat for the Communists.[29] *Gleanings and Memoranda*, the official Tory organ, noted that by the Soviets' own estimates, the membership of the British Communist Party had dropped from 10,000 in 1920 to 3,000.[30] Here and there, Conservatives stated publicly what many more must have known in private, "that neither he [the Prime Minister] nor the leading members of his Government have any sympathy with the Communistic hypocrisy which in Russia has repeatedly made justice the lackey and slave of the party".[31]

But for electoral purposes, no connexion was too slight to carry the weight of evil imputation. *The Times* itself strained every august nerve to find horrors in the Labour manifesto: "A 'national system' of electric generating stations—some such project was dear to Lenin." Churchill spoke darkly of the Government's minority position: did this not prove that Labour, like the Bolsheviks, thought the majority incapable of

ruling? Rowdyism, of which there was an unusual incidence, was seized upon as evidence of Bolshevism.[32]

The Conservative candidate for the Abbey Division of Westminster addressed his educated constituents as follows:

> A vote for the Socialists is a vote for the Communists. They pretend to be separate, but at every crisis we find them together. The same sinister power directs them both, and they both march to the pipers of Moscow under the shadow of the Red Flag. . . .
>
> I am equally opposed to the supreme decision on matters of foreign policy being placed, as it is at present, in the hands of the Socialistiche Arbeiter Internationale.*

From a variety of Tory posters, the Russian bogeyman, clad in rags and the inevitable fur hat, leered or scowled down at the British voting public. Beside a clean-cut British workman who is saying, "I need work", the Russian says, "I wantski £40,000,000". With a colleague, equally loathsome, he is pictured receiving a warm welcome from MacDonald, while in an adjoining picture the Prime Minister rejects sourly the offers of "Imperial produce" from three upstanding representatives of His Majesty's Dominions. Again, the Russian rakes in coins while John Bull displays his empty pockets; the heading is, "So *This* is Socialism—Vote Unionist".[33]

Conservative leaflets pursued the same theme.[34] One warned that parents "should be on their guard against plausible men and women who invite their children to attend Sunday Schools and join clubs", for through such persons, "children are being baptised into the Communistic faith. . . . Special social clubs are organised, and trips into the country are arranged when mimic warfare is practiced. . . . The elder children are even taught the principles of street-fighting and how to blow up bridges, render roads useless, and a dozen other useful forms of warfare." Another, addressed "to Women", was headed "Communism destroys marriage." Red spies, it warned, "may come disguised as nurses and health visitors, or on other pro-

*Election address, in the library at Transport House. Spelling as in the original.

fessed errands of mercy." In a Communistic Britain, "the monarchy will be ended and a Bolshevik Republic set up. Religion will be stamped out. The Home will be destroyed. . . . Children will be taken from their mothers and made the property of the State." And the way in which this leaflet linked such a chamber of horrors to the Labour Government was typical: ". . . there are many Communists today in our so-called 'Labour' Party; and so strong are they that even now our Socialist Government must do their bidding".

Some of Labour's opponents eschewed such arguments. Stanley Baldwin could even envisage without alarm the possibility that Britain might eventually become socialist. "I believe that, as always, love can cast out hate, and that brotherhood can cast out enmity," said he. "And it is brotherhood we want, and it is brotherhood to which I call the nation at this Election."[35] The most that he would permit himself was an occasional bit of comfortable anti-intellectualism: "It is a curious thing that all the words employed on the Socialist platform are words of four and five and six syllables which no one can define. (Laughter.) I do not know myself what the word 'Internationalism' means. All I know is that when I hear it employed it is a bad thing for this country."[36]

The Liberals, with a few exceptions such as Lloyd George and Mond, also avoided the more outrageous types of propaganda. But their failure to do anything to counteract the stream of abuse and innuendo caused the *Manchester Guardian* to charge the party with having tried "to live as a sort of poor relation in the Conservative household".[37]

On the last Friday before the Wednesday poll came the explosion that gave a certain artistic unity, and a name, to this turbulent election. *The Times* announced: "Soviet Plot—Red Propaganda in Great Britain—Revolution Urged by Zinoviev —Foreign Office 'Bombshell'."[38] The Foreign Office, it appeared, had received a copy—no original was ever found—of a letter purporting to be directed to the British Communist Party from the headquarters of the Third International. The letter bore the names of Zinoviev and of McManus, the leader of the British Party, and it was a rambling exhortation to the faithful

to do everything possible to assist ratification of the Russian Treaties, while at the same time carrying on subversive activities and exposing the fundamentally bourgeois nature of MacDonald's Government. Somehow, the *Daily Mail* had come into possession of a copy, too; the Foreign Office, informed of the *Mail*'s intention to print it, had published the letter, together with a very strong note of protest to the Soviet chargé d'affaires, Rakovsky. This note was signed, not by MacDonald, nor by Ponsonby, nor even by the Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Eyre Crowe, but by J. D. Gregory, the permanent civil servant in charge of the Northern Department. Its language was blunt: either the Russian Government was guilty of breach of faith, in not curbing the Comintern's propaganda, or, alternatively, "if responsibilities which belong to the State in other countries are in Russia in the keeping of private and irresponsible bodies, the Soviet Government ought not to make agreements which it knows it cannot carry out".

Over the week-end there was a reply from Rakovsky, denying the authenticity of the letter, pointing out internal evidence of forgery,[39] and protesting against the British breach of the previous year's understanding that efforts would be made to solve difficulties that might arise between the two countries by discussion, "resorting to the dispatch of Notes only in case of this friendly procedure failing to bring about a favourable result". Zinoviev denied having sent any such letter; perhaps more significantly, he offered to accept whatever decision an investigation by the TUC General Council's delegation to Russia might produce on the question.[40]

But, except for some naïve Labourite attempts to accept Rakovsky's denial as tantamount to acquittal of the Soviets,[41] little attention was paid to these Russian replies. The Opposition fell upon the Red Letter with the eagerness of men who have had their worst suspicions justified, and who stand to gain immensely as a result. With the exception of the *Manchester Guardian* and Labour's own *Daily Herald*, the newspapers spent no time debating the authenticity of the letter.[42]

The specific uses to which it was put need not long detain us. *The Times*'s argument was typical, and in a way paralleled the

Foreign Office note: either MacDonald knew all along that the Soviets were in the habit of signing agreements with no intent to keep them, or he has only just learned this by the bitter experience of the Zinoviev letter; if the former, he should never have negotiated the Anglo-Soviet Treaties; if the latter, he stands convicted of incompetence.[43] But the general atmosphere created by the letter, or rather its contribution to an atmosphere already in existence, was the more important feature of the episode. Enough has been said here to indicate how a vague but pervasive suspicion had been built up, connecting the Labour Party with Communism. This suspicion transcended the actual issue of the Russian Treaties or the Campbell case, and made possible the injection into a British election of such irrelevancies as an alleged Soviet memorial in honour of Judas Iscariot.[44] Probably few read the text of the Red Letter, which, after all, condemned the MacDonald Government for its bourgeois moderation. Yet its existence, and the very mystery surrounding it, added one more bit of fuel to an already raging fire. By the close of the campaign, Churchill was reminding his audience of "the story of Kerensky, how he stood there, like Mr. MacDonald, pretending that he meant to do the best he could for his country, and all the time apologizing behind the scenes to the wild, dark, deadly forces which had him in their grip". And on election eve the noble Marquess Curzon of Kedleston put it simply: "Anyone who voted for Labour tomorrow was voting for handing this country over to the Communists and to Moscow."[45]

Meanwhile the Labour camp was thrown into confusion by the letter's appearance.* MacDonald gave his party no lead; he did not mention the letter over the week-end, although it was his Department that had indicated its belief in the genuineness of the document by publishing the note of protest. Despite this awkward fact, most Labour speakers over the week-end

*See the *Daily Herald*, 27 Oct. 1924, which blamed everything on White Russians, announced, "Attack on Prime Minister Fails . . . a damp squib", and gave a fanciful account of how the Foreign Office protest had originated "as the basis for a friendly request for an explanation from Mr. Rakovsky", and had been sent "as a routine matter", without consultation with MacDonald.

expressed doubt as to the authenticity of the letter, and some flatly called it a forgery. Many cited the vigour of the Foreign Office protest as proof that a Labour Government would stand no nonsense from the Russians. Usually the irreconcilability of these two arguments was ignored, and both of them stressed.[46]

When MacDonald finally broke his silence on Monday (with the election Wednesday), the difficulties created by Whitehall's hasty protest became fully apparent.[47] The letter had reached the Foreign Office 10 October; it had not caught up with MacDonald, on his great campaign motor tour, until the 16th. He had minuted asking that the authenticity of the document be checked. Meanwhile, the draft of a protest note was sent him; he got it on the 23rd, made some changes in it and sent it back to Whitehall, uninitialled, the next day, expecting, as he said, to get it back with proof of the genuineness of the Red Letter. Instead, the Foreign Office permanent officials published the letter and protest immediately. When MacDonald reached this point in his narrative, there were cries of "Shame!" from his audience; he hastened to exonerate his officials, who had acted hastily because they knew how strong were his views on propaganda and the maintenance of agreements. He went on to express his own doubts about the authenticity of the letter, but the embarrassment of his position was plain. He was bludgeoned by *The Times* the next day: "We have had a chequered history, but never in modern times has a Minister of the Crown descended so low as to expose the Civil Service, which has no power publicly to defend itself, to attacks on policy for which the Minister alone is constitutionally responsible."[48]

Enmeshed in this dilemma, Labourites found no satisfactory way out, in the brief time left before the polls opened. It is probably true that Labour's followers in the country were, on the whole, less sensitive about the ethics of blaming the Civil Service than Liberals or Conservatives would be; the Foreign Office in particular had long been suspect as a bastion of the old ruling classes. Some Labour candidates, notably E. D. Morel, had no scruples about attacking Gregory personally and expressing regret that the Labour Government had not revolu-

tionized the Foreign Office. But most had to struggle along as best they could, lacking the means or the time to dig up evidence to support the charge of forgery, and left with the Foreign Office note as the symbol of the shadow in which the Russian Treaties stood on the eve of an election in which they were the major issue.

Under these circumstances, Labour went to the polls relying heavily on two things. One was the suspicion, with or without evidence, with which many Britishers regarded any "sensation" in any way connected with the stunt press. A Liberal candidate recorded how, on Monday after the Red Letter, his meetings gained from Labour, but by Tuesday "Labour had regained its confidence. . . . Indeed it was firmer in its faith in face of what it believed to be 'another Tory trick'."[49] The other indestructible asset was that spirit which *The Times* correspondent found in the mining villages of MacDonald's constituency: "These are Labour fortresses and the garrisons are almost incoherently proud of what they have done."[50] MacDonald struck a responsive chord in working people when he described

> this extraordinary phenomenon of a Labour Government that did not fail (cheers); this extraordinary phenomenon of a Labour Government that has met kings and rulers of the earth, that has sat by them, that has conducted itself with distinction and with dignity (cheers); this Labour Government that has met ambassadors, that has faced the rulers of Europe on terms of equality; this Labour Government that has sent its representatives forth—and its representatives have been held as statesmen. . . .[51]

It seems probable that the Labour Party's strongest defence against the irrational fears raised by its opponents was this instinctive pride in the working man's fitness to govern. On the eve of the poll, there were odds of seven to three, on the London insurance market, in favour of a clear majority for the Conservatives. But the odds against there being as many as 390 Tories in the new Parliament were quoted at ninety-nine to one.[52] The strength of Labour's appeal to its own people was not under-estimated in the City.

NOTES

[1]Figures for the elections are taken or derived from Dod's *Parliamentary Companion*, unless otherwise noted.
[2]Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference*, 1924, p. 116.
[3]He was W. S. Royce. See *The Times*, 28 and 31 July 1924.
[4]See the *New Leader*, 28 Mar. 1924, p. 2.
[5]Text in *The Times*, 13 Oct. 1924.
[6]Manifesto, in the *New Leader*, 17 Oct. 1924, p. 3.
[7]Speech at Cwmavon. *The Times*, 25 Oct. 1924.
[8]Labour Joint Publications Department, *Labour's Great Record* (1924), p. 12.
[9]Labour Party, "Election News", Oct. 1924.
[10]*The Times*, 20 Oct. 1924; *Labour's Great Record*, p. 15, and National Joint Council, *Labour Solves the Housing Problem*, "Can Labour Rule?" series, ♯ 5 (1924), p. 15.
[11]*Towards a European Settlement*, "Can Labour Rule?", ♯ 7; MFGB Manifesto, in *The Times*, 18 Oct. 1924; MacDonald at Worksop, in *The Times*, 21 Oct. 1924.
[12]Conservative election address at Westminster (Abbey Div.); Labour election address for Moray and Nairn; MacDonald at Bristol, *The Times*, 22 Oct. 1924.
[13]*The Times*, 20 June 1924; Conservative manifesto in *The Times*, 13 Oct. 1924.
[14]Liberal manifesto, *The Times*, 13 Oct. 1924.
[15]*The Times*, 24 Oct. 1924.
[16]*Daily Chronicle*, 29 Oct. 1924; *Daily News*, 11 Oct. 1924.
[17]*The Times*, 21 Oct. 1924.
[18]See the *Glasgow Evening Citizen*, 18 Oct. 1924; *The Times*, 13 Oct. 1924; and the *Daily News*, 20 Oct. 1924.
[19]*The Times*, 21 Oct. 1924.
[20]See biographies of Lloyd George by Sir Charles Mallet (London, 1930), pp. 255–6; Malcolm Thomson (London, 1948), p. 367; Thomas Jones (Oxford, 1951), p. 211; Frank Owen (London, 1954), p. 684.
[21]*Daily News*, 27 Oct. 1924.
[22]*The Times*, 18 Oct. 1924.
[23]*Daily News*, 2 Oct. 1924; see also *Westminster Gazette*, 11 Sept. 1924.
[24]See leaflet, "The Truth About the Treaties", and *Labour's Great Record*, p. 2.
[25]TUC General Council, "Appeal to the Officials and Members of British Trade Unions", Oct. 1924.
[26]Philip Snowden at Leeds, *The Times*, 18 Oct. 1924.
[27]Speech at Manchester. *The Times*, 16 Oct. 1924. See ibid., 18 Oct. 1924, for Churchill's devastating ridicule of this.

[28]*Blackwood's Magazine*, Mar. 1924, p. 444.
[29]*Report of the Annual Conference*, 1924, pp. 131, 159–64.
[30]*Gleanings and Memoranda*, Oct. 1924, p. 475.
[31]G. R. Hall Caine, M.P., letter to *The Times*, 7 Oct. 1924.
[32]*The Times*, 13, 23–25, and 29 Oct. 1924, and the *New Leader*, 31 Oct. 1924, p. 6.
[33]*New Leader*, 31 Oct. 1924, pp. 6–7, reproduces some of the posters; for analysis of the technique of personification of Bolshevism, see Philip G. Cambray, *The Great Game of Politics* (London, 1932), p. 62.
[34]*Socialist Review*, Nov. 1924, pp. 197–203, describes and quotes liberally from leaflets published by the National Unionist Association. Individual leaflets are on file in the library at Transport House.
[35]At Sheffield, 27 Oct. 1924, quoted in *Gleanings and Memoranda*, Nov. 1924, pp. 604–5.
[36]At Cardiff, *The Times*, 20 Oct. 1924.
[37]*Manchester Guardian*, 31 Oct. 1924.
[38]*The Times*, 25 Oct. 1924.
[39]For textual criticism of the letter, see W. P. and Zelda K. Coates, *History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (London, 1945), pp. 183–4, and R. D. Warth, "The Mystery of the Zinoviev Letter", in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XLIX (1950), pp. 448–9.
[40]*The Times*, 27 Oct. 1924.
[41]See, e.g. *Forward*, 1 Nov. 1924.
[42]See the unpublished dissertation (University of London, 1950) by Charles Higbie, "A Study of the British Press in Selected Political Situations, 1924–38", Ch. II.
[43]*The Times*, 25 Oct. 1924.
[44]Conservative leaflet, quoted in the *Socialist Review*, Nov. 1924, p. 199.
[45]*The Times*, 27 and 29 Oct. 1924.
[46]See *The Times*, 27 Oct. 1924, concerning Wheatley and A. A. Purcell; also ibid., the Labour Party statement, and Snowden's comments.
[47]See *The Times*, 28 Oct. 1924, for MacDonald's account.
[48]ibid., 28 Oct. 1924.
[49]Frank Gray, *Confessions of a Candidate* (London, 1925), pp. 115–16.
[50]*The Times*, 20 Oct. 1924.
[51]From his major broadcast address at Glasgow. *The Times*, 14 Oct. 1924.
[52]*The Times*, 29 Oct. 1924.

XV

THE ELECTION OF 1924
Dimensions of Defeat

The election of 29 October 1924 put an abrupt end to the period of minority government in Britain which many had assumed would last for years.[1] The Conservatives gained 155 seats, and returned to power 413 strong. Labour had 151, a loss of 40. The Liberals, who ten months earlier had dreamed of office, returned a mere rump of 40, a loss of 118 seats.[2]

Labour lost largely in the marginal areas where it had gained the previous year. In Eastern England there were 6 losses and only Noel Buxton, the Minister of Agriculture, stemmed the tide.[3] In Greater London (outside the County), Labour's representation fell from 15 to 7; in Lancashire and Cheshire from 24 to 18; in Scotland from 34 to 26. Only in Yorkshire, where Labour gained a seat for a total of 24, and the West Midlands, constant at 11, did the party hold its own.

The composition of the Parliamentary Party also changed, in the direction of a return to 1922. Members sponsored by Divisional Labour Parties were fewer by 28.6 per cent; those of the Socialist Societies by 30.8 per cent. Members sponsored by trade unions, however, only diminished by 12.2 per cent; the hard core of the old Labour Party, the Miners' M.P.s, did even better, with a decline of 9.1 per cent. Labour's old strongholds stood firm; the new middle-class salient, opened in 1923, suffered severe losses.

Labourites surveying the wreckage found some comfort in an increase of 1,130,882 in the party's popular vote, even though the Tories had gained by over two and a third million. Most cheering of all, to Labour partisans, was the destruction of the Liberals, shorn of three-quarters of their Parliamentary

strength and 1,371,057 of their 1923 vote.* The more charitable might shed a tear for the grand old man, Asquith, beaten at Paisley, despite Conservative support, by "the pocket Rosebery", Rosslyn Mitchell. But few Labourites could regret the fact that the party of Gladstone was now a bad third in every category of constituency save only the Universities, where Labour had yet to penetrate, and the Welsh Counties, where Liberals now stood second to Labour. Liberalism made no net gain over either antagonist in 1924, and no gain at all from Conservatism, which captured 104 Liberal seats.

In one constituency after another, the story was the same: Labour gains, bigger Tory gains, and Liberal catastrophe. In only 29 of the 186 contests where comparison is possible did the Liberal vote rise, and in 16 of the 29 the Liberal vote rose by less than that of the leading opposing candidate. Labour, by contrast, increased its popular vote in 220 of the 256 comparable constituencies. An ILP survey showed the Tory share of the popular vote up from 38 to 47 per cent, Labour up from 31 to 34 per cent, and the Liberals down from 30 to 18 per cent.[4] Even this fails to bring out the dramatic quality of the Liberal downfall in places like Chatham, where the party polled 8,200 in 1923 and 2,800 in 1924, or Bootle, where the Liberal had won a triangular contest in 1923 with 10,400 votes and came in third the next year with 5,400, or Gateshead, where the same thing happened with a decline in the Liberal vote from 17,300 to 9,200.

Labour's Parliamentary leadership emerged largely intact. F. W. Jowett, out at Bradford East by 66 votes, was the only Cabinet Minister to lose a seat. Half a dozen junior Ministers, went down, including Margaret Bondfield. Some future leaders fell—Emanuel Shinwell, Herbert Morrison—but others entered Parliament for the first time: Hugh Dalton, Ellen Wilkinson. Despite all these comforting factors, however, the election came as a shock to loyal Labourites. The Government was doomed, Labour's march for the moment stopped, and a big Tory

*The Labour gains and Liberal losses in popular vote were accentuated by the decrease in Liberal candidates, from 454 to 339, and increase in Labour candidates, from 434 to 509, over 1923.

majority sat in Westminster. What, or who, was to blame?

Many clearly felt that it was the Red scare, in combination with MacDonald's wavering leadership. An unusually outspoken Scots M.P., F. H. Rose, made public his response to an invitation from the acting secretary of the party to a "complimentary banquet" for the ex-Premier:

> Dear Middleton,
>
> Your notification re congratulatory banquet to the Premier is at hand. I know many people who are much more in need of a banquet than he and quite a number who seem to me to better deserve congratulations. Under the circumstances, I shall not be present.[5]

But, though MacDonald undoubtedly failed to give his bewildered followers a clear lead as to how to treat the Red Letter, it must be admitted that his position was made almost impossible by the action of the Foreign Office. Furthermore, despite a physical exhaustion that diminished his effectiveness towards the end of the campaign, MacDonald had provided the indispensable rallying point, the symbolic leadership at the National level, that caused one delirious adherent to call him "the Gladstone of Labour", and made the Aberavon correspondent of *The Times* admit the existence of a "wave of hero-worship" of the man in his constituency.[6] His nation-wide broadcast—the leader of each party undertook one, the first use of wireless in a British political campaign—was not a success; he spoke from a huge rally in Glasgow, and did much less well than Stanley Baldwin, who spoke from a studio and took the trouble to study the specific techniques of broadcasting.[7] But MacDonald's motor tour brought that new Labour asset, the weight of the Prime Ministership, to bear in many parts of the country.

More recently it has been suggested that it was the reduction in the number of triangular contests, resulting from the wholesale Liberal abandonment of seats, that spelled disaster for Labour.[8] There were 120 cases of a triangular fight involving the major parties in 1923 becoming a straight fight in 1924. Of these, 96 represented Liberal withdrawals. The net result of Tory and Liberal withdrawals, in so far as can be judged from

consideration of the statistics in each constituency,* seems to have been a loss of between 17 and 30 seats for Labour, not including some half-dozen additional cases in which withdrawals may have saved Tory or Liberal seats from Labour capture. Against this should be set a net advantage to Labour of 5 or 6 as a result of decisive new interventions that changed straight fights into triangular ones in 1924. Still, the juggling of candidacies does account for a sizeable proportion of Labour's losses. It does less to explain the Tory gain of 155 seats. Of these, not more than 41 can be adjudged the result of changes from triangular to straight fights, or vice-versa.† Thirty-five were won in constituencies where there were interventions or withdrawals that fairly clearly did not affect the outcome. Another bloc of 36 came from constituencies in which there were three-way fights in both years; all but three of these were won from Liberal incumbents. Twenty more Tory gains came from places where there were straight fights with Liberals in both years. Adding the eight seats won in places where Conservative and Labour had straight fights both years, the seven won in plural-member constituencies, and the four captured from Liberals who had enjoyed uncontested election in 1923, accounts for all but four of the 155 Conservative gains.‡

It is, then, an insufficient explanation of the Conservative sweep to cite the interventions and abstentions resulting from Tory-Liberal co-operation in 1924. Does this mean that the Communist issue was the major determinant, or even more specifically, that the Zinoviev letter "settled the fate of the election",[9] as is so often assumed?**

It is probably true, as Philip Snowden says, that the Red Letter "whipped up a large number of indifferent electors to vote

*See above, Ch. V, p. 75.

†A further six may have been retained in Tory hands as a result of changes in the number of parties contesting.

‡The four were miscellaneous: a Tory victory over an Independent incumbent, another where Labour had won from an Independent in 1923, etc.

**David E. Butler, *Electoral System in Britain, 1918–51* (Oxford, 1953), p. 178, provides impressive tables confirming the evidence of the raw data that it was the Liberal collapse that produced a Tory landslide. This does not tell us much about the effect of the Red Letter, however, except to underscore the fact that it seemed to have more impact upon potential Liberal voters than upon Labour supporters.

for Conservative candidates". Snowden also remarks that many who had normally voted Liberal now voted Tory "to make sure that the Labour Government would be overthrown".[10] This reflects a basic truth about the situation of 1924. The mere existence of a Labour Government had altered the complexion of British politics. Had the voters realized in 1923 that the result of their protests against protection was to be to introduce the Labour Party to Downing Street, it is at least doubtful whether the results of that election would have been what they were. Once the deed was done, and Labour ruled, the hopelessness of the Liberals' position was revealed as never before. Both Tories and Labour urged the electors not to waste votes in 1924 on a party that had not even put up enough candidates to have any hope of winning a majority; various observers later found in this a cause of the Liberals' downfall.[11] But in fact the small number of candidates accurately reflected the decline in the party's fortunes through the year, as Tory and Labourite monopolized the centre stage, and one humiliation after another was heaped upon the Liberals. By the time the General Election came along, the pattern of heavy Liberal losses to both sides was already well established in the by-elections.

The existence of the Labour Government, in short, forced more people than ever to make up their minds as between Labour and Conservative. To vote Liberal was already beginning to seem a luxury that the moderate anti-socialist could no longer afford. At the same time, political interest was increased by the presence, for the first time since the war, of a clearly defined pair of alternative Governments, competing for the voter's favour. Weekly sales of Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, for instance, which were 3,900 in 1922, climbed to 7,085 during the Labour Government, and were 5,870 in early 1925.[12] Even without the Red scare, this increased interest might be sufficient to explain the fact that in 106 of the 120 cases where a three-way fight among major parties in 1923 gave way to a straight fight in 1924, the total poll *in*creased, despite the decreased number of candidates.*

*Ten of the fourteen cases of decreases were decidedly one-sided contests, which would naturally tend to diminish interest.

The question then arises whether the Red scare can be said to have approached a panic when it seems likely that the Labour Party received one in three of the new votes brought in by this heightened interest in politics.* Was it reasonable to have expected a much better showing than that, given the failure to deal effectively with unemployment, the vulnerability of the Russian Treaties and the manner in which they were agreed upon, and the fact that some of the Government's principal achievements, such as the Housing Act and the Reparation settlements, were difficult to convert into political advantage, for one reason or another? These were certainly obstacles to Labour success, even if the normal tendency for a Ministry to lose votes from its period of office was in this instance somewhat offset by the boost to morale inherent in the party's first taste of power.

It is hardly surprising that the blame for Labour's defeat has so often been placed upon the unscrupulous use of the Communist issue. It is only human to feel that one's opponents have succeeded by the use of unfair tactics in doing what they could not have done had they stayed within the bounds of reasoned argument. And certainly the Red scare, and especially the Zinoviev letter, did force Labour candidates to fight on their opponents' ground much of the time.[13] But it is noteworthy that Labourites often took the position that, while the Red scare had undoubtedly hurt the cause greatly elsewhere in the Nation, it had left their own loyal supporters in their particular districts totally unmoved.[14] Several defeated Scottish candidates even asserted that over confidence had been a cause of their downfall.†

The Red scare remains a discreditable episode in British politics, although it seems clear that it did no more than sharpen the outlines of the election results; the Conservatives would have won a clear majority, and the Liberals would have

*This is only a very rough guess, based on the fact that Labour's poll increased about half as much as the Conservative poll; these increases, of course, included ex-Liberal voters as well as new voters.

†*Forward*, 8 Nov. 1924. It must be admitted that this, too, is a very common way of rationalizing a political defeat, and so should not be taken too seriously.

suffered catastrophe, even without it. In the long view, the 1924 election represents another step in that painfully slow process of political reorientation that was forced upon post-war Britain by the rise of Labour and the decline of the Liberals. In the cities, especially, this process can be seen at work. In Birmingham, in 1923, Labour came no nearer success than defeat at Ladywood by 1,600 votes; in 1924, King's Norton was captured, the margin of defeat at Ladywood cut to 77 votes, and in two other Divisions was less than 1,000. The Liberals, meanwhile, slipped from 12.5 per cent of the total city vote in 1923, with four candidates, to 1.8 per cent the following year, with three.

In Edinburgh, Liberals held two of the five seats in 1922, and added a third in 1923. In 1924, the Liberal came in third in all three of these seats. Labour fought only one seat in 1922, and won it; in 1923 a second Labour candidate was entered; in 1924, four of the five were contested, two were won, and a third was lost by a thousand votes.

In Liverpool, no Labourite came within 4,000 votes of taking a seat in 1922. The next year, Labour took one, out of eleven. In 1924, Labour took two seats, and came within 600 votes of a third. The Liberals won two seats in 1923; these two winners each landed in third place in 1924.

Perhaps most dramatic of all was Manchester, the ancient home of Liberalism, where the party of Cobden and Bright, excluded from the representation entirely in 1922, won five of the city's ten seats from the Tories in the battle over free trade in 1923. Not only were all five lost again in 1924, but only one Liberal candidate came within 3,000 votes of victory. The Tories took six seats, and Labour four.

Finally, lest these electoral struggles seem riddled with inconstancy, be it remembered that 337 of the 615 seats in the House of Commons never changed hands at all in these three stormy years. Of these, 209 were held by Conservatives, 104 by Labour, and 24 by the Liberals, a statistical monument to the tragedy of what Asquith called "a dying party set between the upper and nether millstones".[15]

NOTES

[1]Ramsay MacDonald among them; see *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1956), p. 38 (21 July 1924).

[2]Figures taken or derived from Dod's *Parliamentary Companion*, unless otherwise noted.

[3]This and the following paragraph are based on figures in G. D. H. Cole, *History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), pp. 170–1.

[4]ILP, *Weekly Notes for Speakers*, 6 Nov. 1924.

[5]*Forward*, 8 Nov. 1924.

[6]P. J. Dollan in the *New Leader*, 17 Oct. 1924, p. 8; *The Times*, 20 Oct. 1924.

[7]J. C. W. Reith (Lord Reith), *Into the Wind* (London, 1949), pp. 96–97.

[8]D. C. Somervell, *British Politics Since 1900* (London, 1950), p. 163.

[9]Cole, *History of the Labour Party*, p. 167.

[10]Philip Snowden, *Autobiography* (London, 1934), II, 716–17.

[11]See *The Times*, 24 Oct. 1924; *Annual Register*, 1924, pp. 112–13; *Liberal Magazine*, Nov. 1924, p. 634.

[12]*New Leader*, 10 Apr. 1925, citing official figures.

[13]For an interesting analysis of this, which perhaps exaggerates its importance somewhat, see Philip G. Cambray, *The Great Game of Politics* (London, 1932), p. 76.

[14]See, e.g. Clement Attlee, *As It Happened* (London, 1954), p. 62; *B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, p. 46 (29 Oct. 1924); Miners Federation of Great Britain, *Annual Volume of Proceedings . . . 1925*, p. 584 (concerns miners' M.P.s in general); W. M. Watson in *Forward*, 15 Nov. 1924.

[15]*H.H.A.: Letters of the Earl of Oxford and Asquith to a Friend*, 2nd series, 1922–7, ed. Desmond MacCarthy (London, 1934), p. 107. Stephen R. Graubard has recently published a clear and telling statistical analysis of the Liberal failure that lies at the heart of the 1924 election, in his *British Labour and the Russian Revolution, 1917–24* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), Ch. XIII.

XVI

AFTERMATH

THE first Labour Government resigned on 4 November 1924. The more sensitive souls had become disillusioned some time before, *vide* H. G. Wells's fierce lament:

> But . . . the new Labour Government has shown itself the least imaginative of Governments. It has excreted or suppressed all its creative elements. It is a class Government and it embodies the subdued mind of the common wages-earner. . . . Its idea of life is the life of the back street in which it has always lived, and it wants more back streets and cheaper back streets to live in, with an occasional treat in the garden of Buckingham Palace.[1]

But the politicians' immediate response to defeat was not lacking in constructive energy. The ILP picked up the challenge of the rural constituencies with a will, if not with supreme tact, by launching "The Backward Areas Campaign". New branches of the ILP sprouted: eleven in one week of November, twenty in another.[2]

There were also recriminations, however. Among the rank and file, criticism of MacDonald's leadership does not seem to have been very serious.* But some of his colleagues raged. Philip Snowden, in private, bemoaned "the great opportunities we have wantonly and recklessly thrown away by the most incompetent leadership which ever brought a Government to ruin"; his wife created a sensation by telling a Canadian audience much the same thing in public.[3] Several people, including Snowden, Wheatley, and Ernest Bevin, approached Henderson to ask him to stand for election as Leader of the

*There was no spate of anti-MacDonald letters in the Labour press; for one in support of him that sheds light on the mood of the rank and file, see *Forward*, 15 Nov. 1924.

Parliamentary Party. Henderson, as Party Secretary, was perhaps more aware than his petitioners of MacDonald's hold on the rank and file; besides, his loyalty and boundless integrity forbade that he take advantage of Labour's defeat to seize the leadership. Instead, he took the chair at a dinner given for MacDonald by the TUC General Council and the Labour Party Executive for the purpose, as Henderson frankly stated, of disproving rumours that the ex-Premier was about to be replaced as Leader.[4]

Efforts to depose MacDonald continued none the less. Within the ILP, Clifford Allen, the Chairman, and Robert Smillie, the respected miners' leader and Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party Executive in 1924, held the fort for MacDonald against the attacks of men as different from each other as Wheatley and Wedgwood.[5] Having failed to carry the ILP, the rebels must have known that their cause was hopeless. Yet at the Parliamentary Labour Party meeting they tried first to postpone selection of a Leader, and then to put up George Lansbury against MacDonald. He declined to stand, however, and MacDonald was re-elected with but five dissenting votes.*

Through most of 1925, according to Beatrice Webb, MacDonald's morale remained low, and his position seemed shaky. As late as 8 August, she reports Henderson as predicting success for a move afoot to replace MacDonald with Snowden.[6] But when the Party Conference met in Liverpool in October, Tom Johnston wrote that MacDonald's resurgence was "the most remarkable feature of the Conference. . . . He is the dominating and outstanding figure in Liverpool today."[7] Later in the year, the rebel group decided not to stand for election to the Parliamentary Executive; Henderson persuaded them that keeping all the militants outside was no way to secure a militant policy, and so they relented, only to go down to ignominious defeat.[8]

*For these events, and their significance, see R. T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties* (London, 1955), pp. 313–14. J. Scanlon, *Decline and Fall of the Labour Party* (London, 1932), pp. 85–86, noted that the PLP, composed of those who had survived the election, tended to feel "that if others had been fit, they would certainly have survived", which reduced the animus against MacDonald.

But the whole episode increased MacDonald's estrangement from the party. From the start of the Government, he had felt, not without some reason, that many in the party gave him more critical advice than support; as early as 4 February, he complained privately that the ILP ought to be carrying on a socialist propaganda, "instead of which everybody wants to be a Cabinet Minister, or if they do not want to be a Cabinet Minister, they want to make a Cabinet of their own".[9] Of the PLP meeting on 3 December, he is said to have remarked bitterly, "Everyone was extraordinarily generous. I was astounded that nobody brought up against me the steady downpour of rain on polling night."[10] His preoccupation with foreign affairs, on the other hand, and the "cloud of overwork" that surrounded him,[11] increased his colleagues' resentment of what they considered his aloofness.[12] The rift, never wholly healed, became a tragic abyss in 1931.

Not surprisingly, the Communists also came in for much blame for Labour's troubles. Without this tiny speck of fire, it was argued, Labour's opponents could not have laid down so effective a smoke-screen to conceal the Government's achievements. In the *New Leader*, J. R. Clynes observed that "A Communist is no more a Left Wing member of the Labour Party than an atheist is a Left Wing member of the Christian Church." The *Daily Herald* urged Labourites "to reason with British Communists and persuade them to drop their notion that a few obscure people could somehow bulldoze this country and hold it down by force." The 1925 Party Conference, with less naïveté, reaffirmed its decision that individual Communists could not legally become members of the party; the vote, which had been close in 1924, was overwhelming: 2,870,000 to 321,000.[13]

There were those who argued that Labour could never hope to become respectable by expelling the Communists. Brailsford uttered the warning, so often heard on the Continent, against diverting socialist energies into attacks upon "the enemy on the left", and at the Annual Conference of the Scottish ILP in January 1925, Communist affiliation only lost by 127–86.[14] But even there, proponents argued that affiliation and absorp-

tion were really the best way to defeat Communism. Whether or not this argument was sincerely advanced, the fact that it was deemed politic to advance it is significant.

Discontent with the Government extended beyond its failure to be socialist; there was often rejection of the frustrations, compromises, and responsibilities of holding office. "At last," sighed an M.P., "it would be possible to say the things that one believed . . . unhindered by the distracting loyalties that distinguished the Parliament of 1924."[15] John Wheatley rejoiced that Labour was free once more: "We can now return to a fighting policy."[16] Neil MacLean argued that as long as there was no majority in the House of Commons, Labour was more powerful in Opposition than as the Government, for "they could make Government by the Liberals and Tories absolutely impossible, and they could compel them to do something for the classes the Labour Party represented."[17] This was in fact a yearning for power without responsibility; yet even Sidney Webb agreed, according to his wife: "A strong Socialist HMO [His Majesty's Opposition], *very seldom in office*, he thinks would be the likeliest instrument of progress. Possibly Lansbury and Cook have after all their uses in keeping the Labour Party out of office."[18]

At conferences of the various bodies affiliated to the party, loyalty usually overcame the urge to criticize. The Presidential Address by Herbert Smith to the MFGB Conference of 1924 expressed a typical view: "In spite of the gibes of the better born, for the first time in history a Workers' Party is governing and successfully directing the fortunes of the country." After the defeat of the Government, the *AEU Journal* praised its "excellent service", only adding, "Being human they had their little fads and failings, but as these have not been lost sight of by the capitalistic press we need not dilate further upon them. . . ." At most, a trade union conference might hear criticized such of the Government's activities as particularly concerned that union. The Post Office Workers' conference, for instance, gave Ministers ample advice on how to treat the Post Office, but delegates' attempts to criticize Labour M.P.s were either beaten by a plea against public condemnations of colleagues in the

movement, or ruled out of order as matters for the Party Conference.[19]

The 1924 Labour Party Conference, meeting in the shadow of the impending election, had especial cause for circumspection. Not until the following year was the Government's performance seriously challenged, by Ernest Bevin's celebrated resolution:

> This Conference is of the opinion that in view of the experience of the recent Labour Government, it is inadvisable that the Labour Party should again accept office whilst having a minority of Members in the House of Commons.

Had this been presented to a Conference immediately after the election, it might conceivably have succeeded. "Everyman, M.P." wrote in December 1924, "Perhaps the average view on the matter is summed up by saying, 'We were right to take office, and the experiment was generally successful, but that's the end—Never again, until we have a real majority'." But by the autumn of 1925, resentments had cooled, and delegates could appreciate the force of MacDonald's argument that passage of the resolution would enable Labour's opponents to say, " 'Do not waste your vote upon people who will take no responsibility except the responsibility of criticism'." Bevin was defeated, 2,587,000 to 512,000.[20]

MacDonald's acceptance of the traditional methods of naming a Cabinet stirred some renewal of the campaign to tie the Labour leadership to the Parliamentary Party, the PLP to the party outside, and the party as a whole to the working class. Most of the various proposals along these lines, including the idea of having the Cabinet elected by the Party Executive or the Parliamentary Party, came to naught. The one exception was a 1924 Conference decision, by a close vote, to make it prerequisite to party membership for a person to join a trade union, if eligible to do so. For the most part, Labourites were content to heed the words of Attlee: "The fundamental fallacy underlying all these proposals is that it is possible by the elaboration of machinery to escape the necessity of trusting one's fellow human beings."[21]

Efforts were made, at the same time, to keep the Labour Party from overshadowing the trade union side of the movement. Fear lest the industrial side be neglected for the political was the theme of both the General Council's Report and the Chairman's address at the 1924 TUC. After the election, it was the politicians who were on the defensive against the TUC's flirtation with the Soviet trade unions in 1925, and the emphasis upon industrial action that was to lead to the General Strike of 1926. A debate at the 1925 TUC, concerning the possibility of setting up separate premises from the Labour Party and ending the Joint Departments that served both organizations, produced this interesting comment upon the previous year's experience:

> In short, they had learned this, that even with a complete Labour majority in the House, and with a Labour Government which was stable and secure, there would be a permanent difference in point of view between the Government on the one hand and the Trade Unions on the other . . . [which] did not arise from any wickedness on the part of the political side, or on the part of the industrial side, but arose from the fact that the Trade Unions had different functions to perform than the functions of Government, and that the Government, whether it was Labour or otherwise, would be influenced by all kinds of considerations which were excluded from the Trade Unions's considerations.[22]

But there were many who saw no conflict between increased separation of the industrial from the political side, and guarantees that the organized working class would control the Labour Party. A clear decision as to the proper relationship between a sectional interest such as the trade unions, however important, and a National party claiming to govern on behalf of the whole community, could hardly have emerged from so brief and hectic an experience as the first Labour Government.

The issues of Labour Party policy were likewise left unresolved after the Government's fall. Gone was some of the glorious self-confidence that led C. P. Trevelyan to write, in 1921, "But the real strength of Labour lies in the fact that it is certain of its purpose and direction. Unlike the Liberal

Government of 1906, it will not have to find out what it ought to do."[23] But the remarkable thing is that there was not more uneasiness in the party about the gaps in policy which the Government's experience had revealed. The Ministry's minority position remained too convenient an excuse; it was invoked everywhere, not only in legitimate cases, such as that of the Agricultural Wages Bill, greatly weakened in Committee by a Liberal amendment stripping the Central Wages Board of its power to review local Wage Committee decisions, but also in much more dubious ones, notably unemployment. Besides, the unusual circumstances of the Government's downfall lent themselves only too well to a preoccupation with questions of tactics, rather than policy. Some who did ponder issues of policy wandered off into such provinces of Never-never Land as the idea of trade unions in the armed forces, or an eight-hour day for legislators.[24] Others either shut their eyes to shortcomings or else, like the Secretary of the Accrington ILP, protested that "Insistence upon 'constructive' policy is endangering advocacy of Socialist principles".[25] In foreign policy there was more progress,[26] but here, too, the Government fell with the revolution in Labour thinking about collective security only half completed. Eventually, the idea that Labour had failed in office for lack of courage rather than lack of ideas helped to drive the ILP out of the Labour Party, and into oblivion. But in the short run the lack of change from the period in office may be symbolized by the fact that the vote at the ILP Conference against the absolute pacifist position on disarmament was virtually the same in 1925 as it had been in April 1924.*

The Labour Party's lack of a clear, coherent ideological structure has ever been the despair of some intellectual critics. Against this it has been argued cogently that freedom from dogma has given the party adaptability and strength.[27] One need not join either camp, however, to find point in Attlee's comment that there was a fatal lack of clarity, in 1924, as to the order in which domestic reforms were to be attempted, and

**Report of the Annual Conference, 1924*, pp. 114–16; ibid., 1925, pp. 134–7. The 1924 vote was 365–196 against the amendment; in 1925 it was 386–210.

that this question of priorities, to resolve which would have necessitated a more exact idea of the nature of each reform, remained unanswered in *Labour and the Nation*, the new programme which may be said to have emerged from the first period in office. [28] Even granting every claim that can be made for the virtues of imprecision, surely Haden-Guest was right in maintaining that there was weakness in a party policy so broad, for example, "that difference about Empire policy as between the constructive policy of Empire building or the destructive policy of Empire smashing are regarded as comparatively minor matters".*

Colonel Wedgwood commented bitterly on the first Labour Government's dependence upon the Civil Service; Lord Haldane noted it, too, but was thankful that the British civil servant was a progressive fellow.[29] In any case, this reliance on permanent officials was the natural recourse for Ministers who found themselves inadequately prepared to meet the problems before them. Such lack of preparation was not fatal in 1924; it became so in 1931. It has been fashionable to blame MacDonald and Jimmy Thomas, with their supposed weakness for persons of money and title, for the latter disaster. Applied to MacDonald, at least, this explanation is badly oversimplified, and in any case the weakness only became dangerous as an accessory to a lack of clear ideas—in 1931, ideas about finance, particularly. The fatal combination of flaws is already present, in most unattractive form, in some of Thomas's speeches in 1924, such as this, to the Newport Chamber of Trade:

> You have for the first time a Government composed in the main of humble working men, men who hitherto have played the role of propagandists and who are now face to face not only with the responsibilities of office, but with the responsibilities of the knowledge of what this great Empire means. Men faced with these responsibilities can never again be the indifferent propagandists that they were in the past. . . .

*Dr. L. Haden-Guest (later Lord Haden-Guest), *Where Is Labour Going?* (London, 1927), p. 140. His formulation of these alternative Empire policies is, of course, hardly fair to those Labourites with whom he disagreed.

> I once wrote a book, *When Labour Rules*. It was a foolish thing to do. It was in the days when I was bothered about material things and wanted money. Although in that book I set out very clearly how to govern the Empire, when on Monday morning one of my principal secretaries comes over [to me with a problem] . . . I cannot very well say to him, "Yes, that is a very serious problem and the answer is found in page 28 of the book." (Laughter) I cannot get out of it like that. . . . It is only cowards that fail to face facts. It is only cowards that pretend that consistency is a virtue.[30]

The slenderness of some of the results of the 1924 experience, and especially its failure to make unnecessary the ordeal of 1931, are not sufficient reasons for condemning the whole experiment. Political decisions are always a matter of choosing among alternative paths of action, and the alternatives which the Labour leadership rejected in 1924 were less sound than the one they chose, that of accepting the chance to prove, by sound administration and a moderate policy, that Labour was "fit to govern". The seemingly bold alternative of taking office only to issue a socialist manifesto and go to the country, in so far as it was not simply a way of escaping responsibility, rested on the delusion that the British public thirsted for a social revolution. The alternative of refusing office entirely would have opened the party to charges of cowardice and irresponsibility. The alternative of working out a *modus vivendi* with the Liberals so as to use the "clear majority in the Commons for progressive measures"[31] was, practically speaking, impossible; MacDonald could not even have suggested such a thing without meeting cries of "Treachery!" on every hand. Besides, unless it had led to amalgamation of the two parties, which few Liberals and hardly any Labourites wanted, this would have meant an unhappy prolongation of three-party politics in a constitutional system built for two.

The moderate policy did, in the end, succeed in forcing the Liberals to appear before the electorate as reactionary allies of the Tories, in order to drive the Government from office. From Labour's point of view this was no mean accomplishment, but

on many occasions before it was achieved the Government left so big a margin between its policy and anything that could be called extremism that there was almost room for the Liberals to squeeze into the gap. The risk was perhaps not really great; the Liberals were too divided to agree on this strategy, or any other, and as long as the trade unions remained loyal, Labour was not easily to be outbid. But there was no reason for the Government to have run the risk at all, and many opportunities were lost for putting the Liberals badly on the defensive.[32]

The first Labour Government marked a stage in the process of converting a band of missionary zealots into a responsible political party, bidding for the difficult and compromising job of governing the country. It was probably inevitable that some of the crusaders should become disillusioned, and drop out of the line of march as this process developed. They clung to their clear consciences, and to political impotence. The first Labour Government alienated an unnecessarily large number of these pure spirits, however, by its excesses in moderation and, in such matters as unemployment, its lack if any distinctive policy at all.

But surely it is both uncharitable and unwise not to sympathize with Ramsay MacDonald and his colleagues of 1924, beset as they were by critics on the Right who felt themselves too practical for Socialism, and by critics on the Left whose pride it was to be too Socialist for practicality. The Government had its manifest weaknesses. It brought neither the millennium nor that lesser beatitude, a Labour majority in the House of Commons. But few of its critics, at the time or since, have governed Britain under more unprecedented and perplexing conditions.

NOTES

[1]Article in the *Westminster Gazette*, 16 Aug. 1924.
[2]See *New Leader*, 21 Nov. 1924, pp. 14–15, 5 Dec. 1924, p. 15.
[3]Letter of 31 Oct. 1924 to F. W. Jowett, quoted in A. Fenner Brockway, *Socialism Over Sixty Years* (London, 1946), p. 222; cf. Snowden to Shinwell (n.d.), quoted in Emanuel Shinwell, *Conflict Without Malice* (London, 1955), pp. 98–99. For Mrs. Snowden, see *The Times*, 13 Jan. 1925.

[4]Ernest Thurtle, *Time's Winged Chariot* (London, 1945), p. 85; John Scanlon, *Decline and Fall of the Labour Party* (London, 1932), p. 85; Francis Williams, *Ernest Bevin* (London, 1952), p. 122; Mary A. Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson* (London, 1938), pp. 256–7; *The Times*, 7 Nov. 1924.

[5]See Josiah Wedgwood, *Memoirs* (London, 1940), p. 187; John Paton, *Left Turn!* (London, 1936), pp. 220–1.

[6]*Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1956), p. 53 (12 Dec. 1924), pp. 64–65 (22 June 1925), and p. 67. For her own bitterness towards MacDonald, see p. 65.

[7]*Forward*, 3 Oct. 1925. See also *B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, p. 74 (2 Oct. 1925).

[8]Scanlon, *Decline and Fall of the Labour Party*, pp. 87–89.

[9]Quoted, from notes made at the time, in Sir Norman Angell, *After All* (London, 1951), p. 243.

[10]"Everyman, M.P." in the *New Leader*, 12 Dec. 1924, p. 6.

[11]Sir Harold Nicolson, *King George V* (London, 1952), p. 388.

[12]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, p. 20 (7 Apr. 1924), p. 42 (2 Sept. 1924).

[13]*New Leader*, 21 Nov. 1924, p. 9; *Daily Herald*, 31 Oct. 1924; *Report of the Annual Conference, 1924*, p. 131, and ibid., *1925*, p. 187.

[14]*New Leader*, 21 Nov. 1924, p. 2; *Forward*, 17 Jan. 1925.

[15]"Everyman, M.P." in *New Leader*, 12 Dec. 1924, p. 6.

[16]*New Leader*, 7 Nov. 1924, p. 4.

[17]Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference, 1925*, p. 247.

[18]*B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, p. 73 (19 Sept. 1925). Her italics.

[19]*Daily Herald*, 9 July 1924; *AEU Journal*, Nov. 1924, p. 37; *Daily Herald*, 7, 10 May 1924.

[20]*Report of the Annual Conference, 1925*, pp. 244, 249–50, 252; *New Leader*, 12 Dec. 1924, p. 6.

[21]*Report of the Annual Conference, 1924*, pp. 153–4; *New Leader*, 3 Oct. 1924, pp. 3–4.

[22]W. J. Brown in TUC *Report, 1925*, pp. 363–4.

[23]*From Liberalism to Labour* (London, 1921), p. 66.

[24]Scanlon, *Decline and Fall of the Labour Party*, pp. 89–92.

[25]*New Leader*, 15 May 1925, p. 18.

[26]See Henry R. Winkler, "The Emergence of a Labor Foreign Policy in Great Britain, 1918–1929", *Jour. of Mod. Hist.*, XXVIII (1956), 257–8.

[27]See Egon Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party*, 2nd ed. (London, 1930), preface to 1st ed., p. xix.

[28]Clement Attlee, *Labour in Perspective—And Twelve Years Later* (London, 1949), p. 53.

[29]Wedgwood, *Memoirs*, p. 186; *B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, pp. 37–38, reporting conversation of 20 July 1924 with Haldane.

[30]*The Times*, 22 Mar. 1924.
[31]*Land and Liberty* (the single-tax organ, and one of the few proponents of Liberal-Labour alliance), Nov. 1924, pp. 198–9.
[32]See Francis Williams, *Fifty Years March* (London, 1949), p. 306, and Charles L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* (Chicago, 1955), p. 174.

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APPENDIX A: THE FIRST LABOUR MINISTRY*

(January 22 to November 4, 1924)

CABINET MINISTERS

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Foreign Secretary	J. Ramsay MacDonald
Lord Chancellor	Lord Haldane
Lord Privy Seal and Deputy Leader of the House of Commons	J. R. Clynes
Lord President of the Council	Lord Parmoor
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Philip Snowden
Secretaries of State:	
Home	Arthur Henderson
Colonies	J. H. Thomas
War	Stephen Walsh
India	Lord Olivier
Air	Lord Thomson
Scotland	William Adamson
Presidents:	
Board of Trade	Sidney Webb
Board of Education	C. P. Trevelyan
First Lord of the Admiralty	Lord Chelmsford
Minister of Health	John Wheatley
Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries	Noel Buxton
Minister of Labour	Thomas Shaw
Postmaster-General	Vernon Hartshorn
First Commissioner of Works	F. W. Jowett
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster	Colonel Josiah Wedgwood

MINISTERS NOT IN THE CABINET

Minister of Pensions	F. O. Roberts
Minister of Transport and Paymaster-General	Harry Gosling
Civil Lord of the Admiralty	Frank Hodges
Attorney-General	Sir Patrick Hastings, K.C.
Solicitor-General	Sir H. H. Slesser, K.C.
Financial Secretary to the Treasury	William Graham

*Taken from the *Annual Register, 1924*, pp. xii–xiii.

Financial Secretary to the War Office	J. J. Lawson
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, and Chief Whip	B. C. Spoor
Under-Secretaries of State:	
Air	William Leach
Colonies	Lord Arnold
Foreign	Arthur Ponsonby
Home	Rhys Davies
India	Robert Richards
War	Major C. R. Attlee
Health for Scotland	James Stewart
Parliamentary Secretaries:	
Admiralty	C. G. Ammon
Agriculture and Fisheries	Walter R. Smith
Education	Morgan Jones
Health	Arthur Greenwood
Labour	Margaret Bondfield
Pensions	J. W. Muir
Board of Trade	A. V. Alexander
Mines	E. Shinwell
Department of Overseas Trade	William Lunn

SCOTLAND

Lord-Advocate	Hugh Pattison Macmillan, K.C.
Solicitor-General	J. C. Fenton, K.C.

APPENDIX B: THE UNSOLVED MYSTERY OF THE ZINOVIEV LETTER

The Labour Government had not time before its fall to reach any conclusions concerning the origin of the Zinoviev letter. The Conservatives set up a Cabinet Committee to investigate the matter, and Austen Chamberlain told the House of Commons in December that evidence of authenticity of the letter had been "conclusive in the mind of all of us [on the Committee]".[1] Beyond this he would not go, except to exonerate all concerned: the Foreign Office, which had simply misunderstood MacDonald's wishes; MacDonald, who, contrary to Tory claims in the heat of the campaign, had not been dilatory in handling the letter. The public, in short, was asked to take the word of a committee of interested parties that the letter was genuine. Some may have wondered why, if the Government had conclusive evidence, it did not take up McManus's challenge to prosecute him.[2] But Labour's protests against dropping the matter got little support from a people understandably weary of the whole affair.

The TUC delegation, to whom Zinoviev had wanted to refer the question, made an investigation at the headquarters of the Third International in November and December 1924. Their inspection included such items as the daily register of outgoing correspondence, containing hundreds of items in different handwritings, and seemingly a difficult thing with which to tamper. The delegation emerged convinced, "so far as a negative can be proved, that no 'Red Letter' ever left the Comintern".[3] Of course it would be idle to pretend that the Comintern was not staffed by trained revolutionaries, capable of omitting things from a register of correspondence. Nor is textual criticism conclusive; it is possible, though perhaps unlikely, that the letter's aberrations of form may have been intentional, just so that the document could be disowned if it fell into unfriendly hands.[4]

There the matter rested for some years. Letters from Sir Eyre Crowe to Lord Haldane shed little additional light on the

mystery; Crowe claimed that the Foreign Office received, after the election, "proof that Zinovieff has admitted to the Soviet Government in Moscow having sent the letter of September 15", but the nature of this proof was not disclosed. As for publication of the letter and the note of protest, Crowe blamed his own misunderstanding of MacDonald's intentions.[5]

In 1928, the subject came up again with the dismissal from the Civil Service of J. D. Gregory, the signer of the protest note, for having speculated in foreign currency. Part III of the Report of the Board of Inquiry into this "francs case" exonerated Gregory of allegations that he had engineered the Zinoviev letter in order to score a financial coup from the Government's defeat. Gregory, it was noted, had advised against publication of the Red Letter, on the grounds that its authenticity would be denied. It was Crowe who had authorized publication; the Board considered his motives beyond suspicion.[6]

The revival of interest in the letter caused Thomas Marlowe, who had been editor of the *Daily Mail* in 1924, to write to *The Observer*, telling how he had obtained copies of it. They had come from two entirely different connexions; the two versions were very similar, although McManus was the addressee in one, and co-signatory in the other.* Marlowe insisted that he had paid nothing for the copies: "The men I dealt with were gentlemen to whom I could not offer money, and who would have been gravely affronted if I had done so."[7]

This brought a renewal of Labour cries for an investigation, backed at first by some Conservative organs.[8] But Baldwin rejected the idea, after introducing a statement from one C.D. im Thurn, who claimed to have obtained the text of the letter from a business acquaintance who was "in close touch with Communist circles in this country", and to have given it to the Government and to another acquaintance who was in touch with the *Daily Mail*. His one motive, said im Thurn, was to expose the seditious activities of the Russians.[9]

*R. D. Warth, "The Mystery of the Zinoviev Letter", in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XLIX (1950), 441–53, points out that McManus had been in Moscow, and thinks that forgers may have wanted to provide for the possibility of his returning home before the letter had appeared publicly.

Beyond this, there have emerged statements in connexion with three trials, two in Germany and one in the USSR, to the effect that the Zinoviev letter was a forgery committed by White Russian émigrés in touch with Polish intelligence officers.[10] At any rate, the idea that the letter was a forgery designed to frighten voters away from the Labour Party has certainly not been killed. Nor has the behaviour of the Foreign Office ever been satisfactorily explained. In 1928, MacDonald was still puzzled as to why his officials had not tried to reach him by telephone concerning the *Daily Mail*'s intention to publish.[11] Again, why was Haldane, deputizing for MacDonald in the latter's absence, or Ponsonby, the Under-Secretary, who was also at hand, not consulted before so drastic a protest note was published?[12]

Finally, Marlowe himself unintentionally cast further doubt on the matter when he wrote:

> I was told simply that he [MacDonald] had sent the letter back to Crowe for further evidence of its authenticity, and that this was regarded by his officials as an indication that he desired to shelve it, as they were already satisfied that it was authentic, and they would not have wasted his time and their own by putting it before him if they had had any doubt on that point.[13]

If this was in fact the understanding at the Foreign Office, what becomes of the excuse that they published the letter through failure to realize that the Prime Minister wished to delay its publication? They may have considered that delay constituted a failure to deal honestly with the public. They may have thought that it was also bad political tactics; Sir Eyre Crowe wrote MacDonald on 25 October 1924 explaining that one of his motives in publishing the letter had been a desire to spare the Government from the charge "that information vitally concerning the security of the Empire had been deliberately suppressed during the elections".[14] But the question remains whether it was any part of their job to make amends for MacDonald on either count by taking action contrary to his instructions as they understood them.

NOTES

[1]179 H.C. Deb., 5 s., 671–4. For the FO's trust in sources from which it got the letter, see *B. Webb's Diaries, 1924–32*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1956), p. 49, and Thomas Johnston, *Memories* (London, 1952), pp. 58–59.

[2]McManus speech at Manchester, 26 Oct. 1924, cited in Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1951), II, 495.

[3]TUC General Council, *The Zinoviev Letter: Report of Investigation by the British Delegation to Russia* (London, 1925), p. 5.

[4]A suggestion made by the *Daily Express*, 28 Oct. 1924, cited in the unpublished dissertation (University of London, 1950) by Charles Higbie, "A Study of the British Press in Selected Political Situations, 1924–38", p. 77.

[5]Quoted in Sir Frederick Maurice, *Life of Viscount Haldane*, Vol. II, *Haldane 1915–28* (London, 1939), pp. 172–4.

[6]*The Times*, 28 Feb. 1928.

[7]*The Observer*, 4 Mar. 1928, reprinted in *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Mar. 1928.

[8]*Morning Post*, 6 Mar. 1928; *The Times*, 7 Mar. 1928; *Spectator*, 10 Mar. 1928; all cited by Fischer, II, 495.

[9]*Manchester Guardian*, 20 Mar. 1928.

[10]Fischer, II, 495–6. Cf. Hugh Dalton, *Call Back Yesterday: Memoirs, 1887–1931* (London, 1953), pp. 176–8.

[11]*Manchester Guardian*, 5 Mar. 1928.

[12]W. P. and Zelda K. Coates, *History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (London, 1945), pp. 184–5; Fischer, II, 497–8.

[13]*The Observer*, 4 Mar. 1928, reprinted in *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Mar. 1928.

[14]Quoted in Sir Harold Nicolson, *King George V* (London, 1952), p. 402.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

These remarks do not attempt a comprehensive coverage of the sources used in the book; specific references are available in the notes. Government publications, such as Parliamentary Debates and Command Papers, are indispensable, and call for no special comment here. The most useful reports from organizations are those of the Labour Party Annual Conference, the ILP Annual Conference, the TUC and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (*Annual Volume of Proceedings*). For most trade unions, reports of proceedings in the *Daily Herald* were used. Many of these organizations, and the National Joint Council (of the TUC, Labour Party Executive and Parliamentary Labour Party), published various *ad hoc* pieces of literature, ranging from election leaflets to major reports such as the National Joint Council's *The Waste of Capitalism*, a report of the NJC's Committee of Inquiry into Production, in March 1924.

Of the newspapers, *The Times* and the *Daily Herald* (then the only daily sympathetic to Labour) were consulted throughout the period; four Liberal papers, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Daily News*, the *Westminster Gazette* and the *Manchester Guardian*, were used selectively, and especially for the period of the Liberal shift from support of the Government to opposition, July through October 1924. Articles from other dailies were consulted chiefly in the form of clippings in the files of the Labour Party Library at Transport House. Of the party and trade union journals, the most useful are the *New Leader*, then edited by H. N. Brailsford, and the Glasgow *Forward*, edited by Thomas Johnston, M.P. (now the Rt. Hon. Thomas Johnston). Since both were ILP organs, and the latter pretty much a Clydeside one, there is some danger that the researcher will find himself seeing the party's behaviour primarily through the eyes of the left wing. This risk is accentuated by the fact that the *Daily Herald*, edited by Hamilton Fyfe, was as yet neither a tame organ of the big battalions nor a commercial success; it still dissented frequently from the majority or official Labour

viewpoint, and usually in a leftward direction. This abundance of contemporary comment from the Left cannot be balanced by reference to the minutes of the Parliamentary Labour Party, for these were lost in the second World War. The minutes of the Labour Party Executive have unhappily not yet been made available to scholars, although these, too, might help restore the balance in our view of Labour in the 1920's. The official party monthly, the *Labour Magazine*, was largely given over to summaries of Government policy written by Ministers, whose views are better studied in Parliamentary Debates. The *Socialist Review* was edited by MacDonald until he became Premier, and then by John Scurr, M.P.; as the ILP monthly, it was intended as a high level journal of socialist thought for a limited audience, but usually fell rather short of this goal. The trade union journals are of limited general usefulness; among the more interesting is the *Shop Assistant*, mainly because of a weekly column by the Union's one M.P., a middle-of-the-road Backbencher named P. C. Hoffman, who was often very frank in his comments.

Among weekly journals of opinion outside the Labour movement, the most useful are the *Economist* (orthodox or Right-wing Liberal), the *Spectator* (unorthodox or Left-wing Conservative, under St. Loe Strachey's editorship), the *Nation* (entering its brilliant Keynes era), and the *New Statesman* (then trying to bridge the gap between Right-wing Labour and Left-wing Liberal). Both the Tories' official monthly, *Gleanings and Memoranda*, and the *Liberal Magazine* are useful; the former is composed largely of clippings from the newspapers, including provincial ones, and from official statements; the latter has more editorial content of its own.

Many Labour politicians remained pamphleteers in the 1920's, although most of MacDonald's and Snowden's production was by then in the past. Among the more interesting of the less prominent books in this general area are: "Seven Members of the Labour Party", *The Labour Party's Aim* (London, 1923), an intelligent critical discussion of Labour's programme; Charles Trevelyan's *From Liberalism to Labour* (London, 1921), a first blast of the new Socialist's trumpet against the monstrous

regiment of Liberals; Dr. L. Haden-Guest's (Lord Haden Guest) *Where Is Labour Going?* (London, 1927), an instance of disenchantment with the party, since healed, on the part of one who was neither a leftist nor a post-1931 MacDonaldite; and Clifford Allen (Lord Allen of Hurtwood), *The I.L.P. and Revolution* (London, 1925) a representative bit of soul-searching in the wake of the Labour Government, with a misleading title.

General studies of the Labour Party in the period are numerous and of varying quality. Most come from the pens of sympathizers, and a disproportionate number (hardly surprisingly) from more or less disillusioned intellectuals of the left. G. D. H. Cole's *History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948) must head any list as the most comprehensive and informed book on the subject. It is, of course, only one of many essential works by this author covering most aspects of the Labour movement. The most interesting recent contribution has come from R. T. McKenzie, in his *British Political Parties* (London, 1955). The more valuable also include the Rt. Hon. C. R. Attlee, *The Labour Party in Perspective, and Twelve Years Later* (London, 1949); Carl Brand, *British Labour's Rise to Power* (Stanford, Calif., 1941); Francis Williams, *Fifty Years March* (London, 1949); G. T. Garratt, *The Mugwumps and the Labour Party* (London, 1932); John Scanlon, *Decline and Fall of the Labour Party* (London, 1932); and Egon Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party* (London, 1930). For a representative Communist view, see Allen Hutt, *Post-War History of the British Working Class* (London, 1937). The one study devoted to the first Labour Government itself is Jacques Bardoux, *Le Socialisme au Pouvoir: l'expérience de 1924* (Paris, 1930), which aims chiefly at demonstrating how much more patriotic and less socialist than the French Socialist Party of Blum was the British Labour Party of MacDonald. The chief sub-plot, how Herriot was tricked and bested at diplomacy by MacDonald, results in undue absorption in this one side of the Government's activities, though there are interesting comments. C. L. Mowat, in Chapter III of his masterly survey, *Britain Between the Wars* (Chicago, 1955), gives a balanced, modern account of the Government's career; the notes in Professor Mowat's book

constitute in themselves a comprehensive bibliography of this period. See also his article, "Some Recent Books on the British Labor Movement", in the *Journal of Modern History*, XVII (1945), 356–66.

Space does not allow general consideration of the many books on special topics which are useful, but a representative few may be mentioned to suggest the range and variety of such works: George Glasgow, *MacDonald as Diplomatist: The Foreign Policy of the First Labour Government* (London, 1924), journalistic and uncritical, but convenient; W. P. and Z. K. Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (London, 1945), strongly pro-Soviet but quotes extensively from various sources, including Russian ones; Philip G. Cambray's stimulating little volume on political strategy and tactics in Britain, *The Great Game of Politics* (London, 1932); S. R. Graubard's *British Labour and the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), a recent and scholarly American contribution.

Finally, there are the swarms of biographies and memoirs. Those dealing with MacDonald, Snowden, Thomas, Clynes and the Webbs have been mentioned in the notes for Chapter I above; they include the two most useful of all, Snowden's *Autobiography*, 2 vols. (London, 1934), and *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1912–24* and *1924–32* ed. Margaret Cole (London, 1952 and 1956). A few of the more valuable books in this category dealing with other figures are listed herewith: A. Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left* (London, 1942), and *Socialism Over Sixty Years: The Life of Jowett of Bradford* (London, 1946); Margaret Bonfield, *A Life's Work* (London, 1948); Keith Feiling, *Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1946); T. N. Graham, *Willie Graham* (London, 1948); Thomas Jones, *Lloyd George* (London, 1951), which remains more interesting than F. Owen's *Tempestuous Journey* (London, 1954); Hugh Dalton, *Call Back Yesterday* (London, 1953); R. B. Haldane (Lord Haldane), *An Autobiography* (London, 1929); General Sir Frederick Maurice, *Life of Viscount Haldane of Cloan*, II, *Haldane, 1915–28* (London, 1939); Lucy Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman* (London, 1939); Sir Patrick Hastings, *Autobiography* (London, 1948); Thomas Johnston, *Memories* (London, 1952); David Kirkwood, *My Life*

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The following persons were kind enough to give the author interviews concerning their recollections of the events of 1924: Mr. H. N. Brailsford, Mr. A. Fenner Brockway, M.P., Mr. Francis A. Broad, the Rt. Hon. Arthur Creech Jones, Mr. Sydney Elliott, the late Arthur Greenwood, M.P., Lord Haden Guest, Mrs. Mary Agnes Hamilton, Dr. Somerville Hastings, M.P., Mr. J. S. Middleton, the Rt. Hon. Philip J. Noel-Baker, M.P., the Rt. Hon. the Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the Rt. Hon. Emanuel Shinwell, M.P., the late Lord Strabolgi, the late Ernest Thurtle, M.P., and the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Trevelyan, Bart., who is now the one surviving member of the first Labour Cabinet. Needless to say, however, none of these persons is in any way responsible for the views expressed in the foregoing pages.

INDEX

Aberavon, 64, 266
Accrington, 64
Adamson, William, 122–3
Addison, Christopher, 1st Baron, 62, 110
Adler, Friedrich, 38*n*
Agricultural Wages Bill, 278
Agriculture, I.L.P. report on, 14; Conservative programme, 28; as issue in 1923 campaign, 34
Allen, Clifford Allen, 1st Baron Allen of Hurtwood, 90, 92, 227, 273
Amalgamated Engineering Union, 147–8; *A.E.U. Journal*, 275
Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, 1
Amery, L. S., 24, 25, 97, 232
Ammon, C. G., 211
Angell, Sir Norman, 175*n*
Anglo-Russian Conference, 186–94, *passim*
Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement (1921), 190
Anglo-Russian Treaties, negotiation of, 187–94, *passim*; provisions of, 195–6; Conservative and Liberal views on, 196–207, *passim*; Labour support of, 198; Russian attitude toward, 198–9; as issue in 1924 election, 249, 254–5, 259, 261, 269; and Zinoviev letter, 258
Annual Conference (Labour Party), 1918, 3
Annual Conference (Labour Party), 1922, 88
Annual Conference (Labour Party), 1924, Morrison's speech at, 139; and financial policy, 151; and Dawes Plan, 166; and Campbell case, 241; position on Communists, 255; decision on Labour Party membership, 276
Annual Conference (Labour Party), 1925, MacDonald's resurgence at, 273; votes against Communist affiliation, 274; Bevin's resolution at, 276
Arnold, Sydney, 1st Baron, 104
Asquith, Herbert Henry, 1st Earl of Oxford and Asquith, as leader of Liberals, 18; and Liberal reunion, 26; and 1923 election, 42, 46–47, 48, 50, 51; characterized, 66; on Labour government, 85–86, 233; on Baldwin government, 97–8; on eviction bill, 125; and Poplar issue, 133; quoted, on Wheatley, 134; and Liberal-Conservative co-operation, 253; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 201–4, *passim*; and Lloyd George, 236; and Campbell case, 239, 243–4; defeated in 1924, 265; mentioned, 82, 84, 231
Association of British Creditors, 188
Astor, Nancy (Langhorne), Lady, 134
Attlee, Clement, 1st Earl, 55, 104, 276, 278–9
Ayles, Walter, 213

Baldwin, Stanley, 1st Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, characterized, 19; and tariff issue, 20–32, *passim*, 66, 73; attitude toward Lloyd George, 24; announces Dissolution, 27; and agricultural subsidy, 28; and press lords, 33; and public works, 57; urged to support Liberal Government, 82; resignation of, 83, 98; and King George V, 86; and Labour Party, 97; urges Haldane's acceptance of Cabinet post, 101; and eviction bill, 125; his Budget, 145; on MacKenna Duties, 147; and Reparations Commission, 158; calls for debate on Campbell case, 238; quoted, on Government prosecutions, 245; on socialism, 257; his election broadcast, 266; and Zinoviev letter, 287; mentioned, 38, 46, 54
Balfour, Arthur James, 1st Earl, 83, 84
Balfour, Sir Arthur, 1st Baron Riverdale, 138
Banbury, Sir Frederick, 232
"Bankers' Memorandum', 188
Bardoux, Jacques, 163*n*
Barlow, Sir Montague, 70
Barnes, Major Harry, 113
Beauchamp, William Lygon, 7th Earl, 202
Beaverbrook, William Maxwell Aitken, 1st Baron, 24, 33, 239*n*
Benes, Eduard, 174, 175
Benson, George, 66
Berkeley, Reginald, 46
Beveridge, Sir William Henry, 1st Baron, 142
Bevin, Ernest, and strikes, 219, 220; on leadership of Labour Party, 272; resolution against minority government, 276
Birkenhead, Frederick Edwin Smith, 1st Earl, on the Labour Party, 6, 38; as Minister, 20; Baldwin seeks support of, 23; and Beaverbrook, 33; and Campbell case, 239*n*
Birmingham, 270
"Black Friday", 5
Blackburn, 64
Blackwood's Magazine, 72, 186, 255
Bolton, 64
Bondfield, Margaret, and unemployed women, 135, 136; and Washington Conference Conventions, 217; defeated in 1924, 265
Bootle, 265
Bowley, A. L., 43
Bradford, 265
Brailsford, H. N., against compromise with Liberals, 90; financial views, 149, 151; approves of Geneva Protocol, 178, 179; and Rakovsky, 185; on Communists, 274
British Legion, 57
Brockway, A. Fenner, 232, 249
Brown, Ernest, 120
Brown, James, 106
Buckingham, 77
Budget (1924), 145–9, 236, 250
Building Materials (Charges and Supply) Bill, 116–17
Building Trade Committee, 111–12, 113–14
Burnley, 249
Butler, David E., 267
Buxton, C. Roden, 64, 73
Buxton, Noel, 1st Baron Noel-Buxton, 105, 264
By-elections, 200, 248–9

Cabinet, first Labour, formation of, 99–105; members of, 284
Callaghan, Sir A., 48
Campbell, J. R., 237, 238
Campbell case, vote on, 204; account of, 237–45; as issue in 1924 campaign, 249, 259
Capital levy, *The Times* on, 37; as issue in 1923 campaign, 55, 58–60; abandonment of, 144, 145
"Capital or Labour? The Election Issue of 1923", 62
Carmarthen, 249
Carter, Gwendolen, 180*n*
Cave, George Cave, 1st Viscount, 101
Cecil, Lord Hugh, 1st Baron Quickswood, 35
Cecil, Lord Robert, 1st Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, 50, 167, 168, 171

Chamberlain, Sir Austen, and tariff, 22, 24, 25, 30–31; Baldwin seeks support of, 23; entertained by Beaverbrook, 33; and 1923 campaign, 38; and eviction bill, 125; on Versailles Treaty and Labour Government, 165; and Geneva Protocol, 176; quoted, on Zinoviev letter, 286; mentioned, 20, 84, 163
Chamberlain, Joseph, 25, 27
Chamberlain, Neville, and housing, 19, 110–11, 112, 117–24, *passim*; as Minister, 20; and tariff, 22, 25, 26, 28; quoted, on Baldwin, 24–25; quoted, on Labour in government, 84; and Censure Debate, 97
Chatham, 265
Chelmsford, Frederick John Thesiger, 1st Viscount, 103–5, 211, 214
Cheshire, 65, 71, 264
Churchill, Sir Winston, entertained by Beaverbrook, 33; and 1923 election, 38, 62, 71; quoted, on tariff, 44; on socialism, 82, 85, 255–6; 259; and formation of a Labour Government, 84; and Burnley by-election, 235; in 1951 election, 237*n*; and Westminster Abbey by-election, 249
City of London Conservative Association, 82
Clyde, James Avon, Lord, 103
Clydebank, 122
Clydesiders, role in Labour Party, 9; views on Labour programme, 89; and Macmillan's appointment, 103; and housing, 128, 129; and Imperial Preference Resolutions, 148, 214*n*; behaviour in Parliament, 231–2
Clynes, J. R., characterized, 7; as Free Trader, 54; quoted, on capital levy, 59–60; in 1923 election, 63; in Censure Debate, 97; experience in Government, 104, 230; and housing, 125, 126, 128; on Snowden's Budget, 148; and Soviet recognition, 186; as Deputy Leader, 231; quoted, on Communism, 274
Coalition Government (1918–22), 19, 66, 132, 157
Cole, G. D. H., 11–12
Colwyn, F. H. S., 1st Baron, 144
Committee of Imperial Defence, Lord Haldane and, 101, 102, 212; and Geneva Protocol, 177, 179
Communism, as issue in 1923 campaign, 36–39; as issue in 1924 election, 249–50, 255–69, *passim*, 274
Communist Party, in 1923 election, 64–65
Communists, Labour's attitude toward, 184–5, 191, 255, 274; and strikes, 221–2; and Campbell case, 238, 239
Conservative Government, account of, 18–20; Dissolution announced, 22; and 1923 election, 83; Debate on Censure of, 97–98; falls, 98; economic policy, 132
Conservative Party, effect of war on, 4; Annual Conference, 1923, 20; and tariff issue, 20–25, 27–34; and 1923 campaign, 22–39; agricultural policy, 34; and unemployment, 34–35, 251; foreign policy, 35–36; relations with Liberals in 1923 election, 63–64; and 1923 election results, 70–79, *passim*; and housing, 111, 112, 117–25, *passim*, 251; and McKenna Duties, 147; on Soviet recognition, 186; and Anglo-Russian Conference, 186–99, *passim*; and Campbell case, 238–40; in by-elections, 248–9; and Communist issue, 249–50, 255–7; manifesto, 251–2; and 1924 election results, 264, 265; effect of withdrawals and interventions on, in 1924, 266–7
Cook, Arthur James, 275
Coolidge, Calvin, 158
Council of Foreign Bondholders, 188
Coupon election. *See* Election of 1918
Cramp, C. T., 217, 222, 225
Creech-Jones, Arthur, 219
Crowe, Sir Eyre, on reparations, 162; and Zinoviev letter, 258, 286–7, 288
Cunliffe Committee, 132
Curzon, George Nathaniel, 1st Marquis, in Conservative Cabinet, 20; and Ruhr issue, 35, 49; compared with MacDonald, 163, 168, 181, 206; protests against Russian propaganda, 190; quoted, on Labour Party and Communism, 259
Cyprus, 215

D'Abernon, Edgar Vincent, 1st Viscount, 242*n*
Daily Chronicle, opposes Baldwin, 32; slights Labour campaign, 66; on Anglo-Russian Treaties, 197, 200, 201, 203, 204; advises Liberal-Conservative co-operation, 252–3; quoted, on Liberal Party's dilemma, 254
Daily Express, 32, 66, 147
Daily Graphic, 32
Daily Herald, opposes Baldwin, 32; quoted, on tariff, 54; quoted, on capital levy, 59; cited, on press coverage of Labour campaign, 66; rise in circulation, 106; on Court dress, 107; Wedgwood's article in, 149; supports Russian loan, 188; on Iraq policy, 215; and Zinoviev letter, 258, 259*n*; quoted, on Communists, 274
Daily Mail, opposes Baldwin, 32; Prof. Morgan's article in, 81–82; reaction to Labour Government, 82; slights Labour campaign, 66; and Zinoviev letter, 258, 287, 288
Daily Mirror, 32
Daily News, opposes Baldwin, 32; on Anglo-Russian Treaties, 196–7, 200, 201, 202; quoted, on Hastings, 243; and 1924 election, 252, 253
Daily Sketch, 32
Daily Telegraph, 32
Dalton, Hugh, 9, 149, 265
Davidson, J. C. C., 33
Dawes, Gen. Charles G., 159
Dawes Plan, provisions of, 159–60; and Versailles Treaty, 162; and London Conference, 163–4; Labour reaction to, 164–66; as issue in 1924 election, 251, 269
Defence, 211–13
Derby, Edward George Villiers Stanley, 17th Earl, quoted, on Baldwin, 19; and tariff issue, 22; threatens to resign, 23; on Ruhr issue, 35; and Liberal-Conservative co-operation, 64
Desmond, Shaw, 11
Devonshire, Victor Christian William Cavendish, 9th Duke, 23
Dickson, Tom, 219, 237, 240–1
Disarmament Conference, proposed, 173, 177, 178
Disraeli, Benjamin, 1st Earl of Beaconsfield, 83
Dissolution, power of, 86, 87
Divisional Labour Parties, representation of, in House of Commons, 5, 71, 264; vote at Annual Conference, 6
Dollan, P. J., 13
Dominion Governments, and Geneva Protocol, 176, 179–80
Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, rejection of, 171–2; and Geneva Protocol, 175–6, 178–9

Early Closing Association, 31
Eastbourne, 63
Economic policy, Labour views on, 149–54. *See also* Capital levy, Nationalization, Tariff, Unemployment

Economist, on the tariff, 42, 43, 45, 46; on inflation, 48; on unemployment, 48; quoted, on Labour in government, 82
Edinburgh, 270
Education, 211
Egypt, 215
Election of 1905, 1
Election of 1910, 1–2
Election of 1918, 3, 5
Election of 1922, 5, 18
Election of 1923, Conservative campaign, 27–39; Liberal campaign, 42–51; Labour campaign, 53–66; Liberal and Labour programmes compared, 60–61; Liberal-Labour co-operation, 63; Liberal-Conservative co-operation, 63–64, 73; Communist-Labour candidates, 64–65; numcer of Lacour candidates, 65; unexpected results of, 69–70, 268; analysis of results of, 70–80; effect of withdrawals and interventions in, 75–79; results compared with 1922 election results, 75–80 reactions to results, 81–82; causes constitutional problem, 83
Election of 1924, and Liberal-Conservative co-operation, 64, 252–4; Labour manifesto, 250–1; Conservative manifesto, 251–2; Liberal manifesto, 252; Communist issue, 254–61; analysis of results of, 264–70; radio broadcasts in, 266; effect of withdrawals and interventions in, 266–7
Electric power development programme, 139–40, 225–6
Elliott, Walter, 70*n*
Emergency Powers Act, 220, 222
Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades Federation, 218
English Review, 30, 35, 81
Evening News, 32, 33, 66
"Everyman, M.P.", 276
Evictions. *See* Housing.
Export Credit scheme, 133, 135, 142, 187

Fabian Society, 2. 8
Federation of British Industries, 140
Feiling, Keith, 25*n*
Fisher, H. A. L., 46
"The five cruisers", 211–12, 213, 233
Foreign trade, 131–2. *See also* Tariff, Anglo-Russian Treaties
Forestry Commission, 141
Fortnightly Review, 42
Forward, quoted, on Budget, 148; cited, on Kamenev's speech, 204*n*; quoted, on armaments, 213; mentioned, 136, 166, 193, 216
Franchise, extension of, 4, 5
Franco-British Memorandum, 162, 173
Free Trade. *See* Tariff
Fyfe, Hamilton, 215

Gallacher, William, 64
Gandhi, Mohandas, 214
Gardner, Benjamin, 123–4
Garvin, J. L., 87
Gateshead, 265
"Geddes Axe", 66, 110
General Strike (1926), 277
Geneva Protocol, 174–81, 251, 252
George V, King, dissuades Baldwin from resigning, 83; consults Asquith, 86*n*; and MacDonald, 96*n*, 105; quoted, on MacDonald and Labour Government, 98–99; quoted, on Dissolution of Labour Government, 245
George, Gwilym Lloyd, 201
George, David Lloyd, 1st Earl Lloyd George of Dwyfor, Coalition Government, 18, 62, 66; and tariff, 23, 24, 26, 44, 45; entertained by Beaverbrook, 33; on Conservative Party poster, 38; and policy of inflation, 48; foreign policy, 50; attitude of extreme Tories toward, 85; and Left-wing Liberals, 88, 236; his *Coal and Power*, 140, 224–5, 252; and public works, 151; attack on MacDonald quoted, 170*n*; on Anglo-Russian Treaties, 199–200, 201–2, 207; on nationalization bill, 224; attacks Labour for non-co-operation, 235–6; and Communist issue, 239, 257
German reparations, Conservative Government and, 19; as issue in 1923 campaign, 35, 50, 55; negotiations on, 158–67, *passim*. *See also* Dawes Plan
Glasgow, 77, 122
Glasgow Herald, 205
Gleanings and Memoranda, 38, 255
Gold standard, 132, 147
Gordon, Capt., 59
Gosling, Harry, 220
Graham, William, defends Sudan guarantee, 136; and financial policy, 152, 153; and nationalization, 227
Grant, Sir Alexander, 240
Greenwood, Arthur, on capital levy, 58–59; characterized, 111; in housing debate, 117
Greenwood, Sir Hamar, 71
Gregory, J. D., 256, 260, 287
Grenfell, E. C., 189
Gretna auction, 226
Grey, Sir Edward, 1st Viscount Grey of Fallodon, on unemployment, 48; proposed as head of coalition, 84; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 202; praises Labour's foreign policy, 236
Guest, F. E., 98
Guild Socialists, 3, 9

Haden-Guest, Leslie H., 1st Baron, 216, 279
Haldane, Richard Burdon, 1st Viscount, and formation of Cabinet, 96–97, 100–5, *passim*; and electrical development, 140; and Geneva Protocol, 177; and defence policy, 212–13; cited, on strikes, 222; praises MacDonald, 231; and Campbell case, 241; on Civil Service, 279; and Zinoviev letter, 286, 288
Halifax, Edward Frederick Lindley Wood, 3rd Viscount, 239
Hamilton, Mary Agnes, 239*n*
Hannington, Wal, 255
Hansard, sales of, 268
Hardie, George, 121, 164
Hardie, James Keir, 1, 2
Hastings, Sir Patrick, Clydesiders ask his advice, 232; and Campbell case, 237–8, 239, 242–5
Henderson, Arthur, and 1918 constitution of Labour Party, 2, 5; characterized, 6; as Methodist lay preacher, 10; and tariff, 26, 54; and 1923 election, 64, 69, 70–71, 73, 88; and formation of Cabinet, 99, 102, 104; on Versailles Treaty, 169; and Geneva Protocol, 175–8, *passim*; abused in Soviet press, 192; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 193*n*; and strikes, 218, 223*n*; and Burnley by-election, 249*n*; and leadership of Labour Party, 272–3
Herriot, Edouard, 162, 173, 174, 178
Hewins, W. A. S., 22
Hill, John, 188
Hoare, Sir Samuel, 1st Viscount Templewood, 212, 239*n*
Hodges, Frank, 104
Hoffman, P. C., 127, 241
Hogbin, H. C., 38
Holland-with-Boston, 249
Horne, Sir Robert, 1st Viscount, 20, 145

Housing, and Conservative Government, 19; Labour programme, 111–29; as issue in 1924 election, 250–1, 269
Housing (Financial Provisions)—Memorandum, 115–16
Hughes, Charles Evans, 158
Humphreys, Travers, 243
Hunter, Ernest, 223
Hutchinson, W. H., 188

Imperial policy, 213–17, 279
Imperial Preference Resolutions, 148, 214
im Thurm, C. D., 287
Incitement to Mutiny Act, 237
Independent Labour Party, pacifism of, 2, 4; role in Labour Party, 7, 278; report on agriculture, 14; and tariff issue, 53–54; and unemployment, 57–58, 141, 143, 250; and foreign policy, 105, 157, 179; and Labour Party leadership, 111, 273; Summer School, 149, 179, 227; and financial policy, 151; and defence, 213; on Government and unions, 222–23; and imperial policy, 217; response to defeat, 272; MacDonald on, 274
Independent Labour Party (Scotland), 88–89, 274–5
India, 214–15
Industrial Courts Act, 222
Iraq, 215
Ireland, 3
Irish boundary dispute, 193, 238
Iron and Coal Trades Review, 205

Jackson, Stanley, 33
Johnston, Thomas, views on Labour strategy, 89; questions Sudan guarantee, 136; on Dawes Plan, 165, 166; and imperial policy, 216–17; member of Parliamentary Labour Party Executive Committee, 233*n*; quoted, on MacDonald, 273
Jones, Dr. Thomas, 23
Jowett, Frederick William, 5, 105, 265
Joynson-Hicks, Sir William, 1st Viscount Brentford, 57, 125, 250*n*

Kamenev, Lev Borisovich, 198–9
Kelvingrove, 249
Kenworthy, Joseph Montague, *See* Strabolgi, Joseph Montague Kenworthy, 9th Baron
Keynes, John Maynard, 1st Baron, quoted, on tariff, 43, 50; attacked by Dalton, 149; financial policy, 150–1
King's Norton (Birmingham), 270
Kirkwood, David, 1st Baron, and 1923 election, 55; opposes minority Labour Government, 88; quoted, on Labour Government, 106; quoted, on housing, 112, 124, 125–6; quoted, on Wheatley, 232
Krassin, Leonid Borisovich, 188

Labour and the Nation, 279
Labour and the New Social Order, 3
Labour Commonwealth group, 216
Labour Government, differing views on purpose of, 89–91; formation of, 99–106; weaknesses of, 230–31; and Parliamentary management, 231–3; defeat of, 244; resignation of, 272; its effect on political situation, 268, 270; Labour Party post-mortem on, 272–8; evaluation of, 280–1; members of, 284–5. *See also* specific issues and programmes
Labour Party, diversity of views in, 1–2, 5–12, 149, 210; effect of war, 2, 4; 1918 constitution, 2–3; adopts socialism, 3; and 1922 election, 5; programme, 13–16; 1931 crisis, 15, 274; linked with Communism in 1923 campaign, 36–39; 1923 campaign, 53–66; and 1923 election results, 69–74, *passim*; effect of interventions and withdrawals, in 1923 election, 75–79; attitude toward, in government, 81, 82, 84, 85; differing views on acceptance of office, 87–93; attitude toward wearing Court dress, 106–7; and foreign policy, 157, 179; attitude toward Communists, 184–5, 191, 255, 274; linked with Communism in 1924 campaign, 249–50, 255–69, *passim*, 274; 1924 manifesto, 250–1; effect of withdrawals and interventions in 1924 election, 253, 266–7; record in 1924 election, 264, 265; relations with trade unions, 276–7; uncertainty of policy, 277–9; relations with Liberal Party, 280–1. *See also* Annual Conference, National Executive, Parliamentary Labour Party.
Labour relations, 217–23
Ladywood (Birmingham), 270
Lanarkshire Hydro-electric Power Bill, 140
Lancashire, 22, 65, 71, 264
Land Valuation Office, 146
Lansbury, George, returned in 1922 election, 5; and formation of Cabinet, 103; and Borough Council of Poplar, 133; on Labour Government and unemployment, 142; quoted, on trip to Russia, 184; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 194; proposal concerning industrial disputes, 212; member of Parliamentary Labour Party Executive Committee, 233*n*; suggested for Labour Party leadership, 273; Webb on, 275
Law, Andrew Bonar, his Government, 18, 24; resignation, 19; and tariff, 20, 21
Lawrence, Susan, 233*n*
Leach, William, 104, 215
League of Nations, Liberal support of, 50; as issue in 1923 campaign, 55; and Labour Government, 167–8, 169; MacDonald quoted on, 170; Assembly (1924,) 173–4, 176; Council, 175, 176; and Russia, 185; 1924 campaign, 252
League of Nations Parliamentary Committee, 173
League of Nations Union, 168
Leeds Conference, 38, 186*n*
Lees-Smith, H. B., 5, 232
Lenin, Nikolai, 185, 186, 191
Liberal Government (1905–14), 4
Liberal Magazine, quoted, on tariff issue and Dissolution, 26; quoted, on Liberal programme, 47, 61; quoted, on Coalition Government, 85
Liberal Party, split, in 4; representation in Parliament, 1923, 18; reunited on tariff issue, 21, 26, 49; and 1923 campaign, 42–51; and public works, 47–48; and unemployment, 48–49; and foreign policy, 49–50; disunity of, 50–51, 62, 236–7; programme compared with Labour's 66; and 1923 election results, 70, 71; reaction to 1923 election results, 72–73; weakness of, in 1923 election, 75–76, 77, 79; attitude toward coalition government, 85; attitude toward Labour government, 86–87; and housing, 111, 112–13, 118–20, 123–4, 125; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 199–204; relations with Labour Government, 233–7; and Campbell case, 239–40, 243–4; record in by-elections, 249; 1924 manifesto, 252; dilemma of, in 1924 election, 252–4; and Communist issue, 257; and 1924 election results, 264–5; effect of withdrawals and interventions in 1924 election, 266–7
Liverpool, 270

Lloyd-Graeme, Philip. *See* Swinton, Philip Lloyd-Graeme, 1st Viscount
Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, 218
London, 65, 71, 264
London Conference, 162–4, 173, 193
London Trades Council, 185
London Traffic Bill, 220, 226
Long, Walter Hume, 1st Viscount Long of Wraxhall, 83
Low, David, 54

McCurdy, Charles, 46, 71
MacDonald, James Ramsay, on extension of the franchise, 5; characterized, 7–8, 10; quoted, on classes, 10; on union officials in Parliament, 11; attacked as Communist, 12; on party programmes, 13; on Labour policy, 14–15, 16; and tariff, 26, 53, 54; and 1923 election, 31, 69; quoted, on Versailles Treaty, 56; on capital levy, 59; quoted, on socialism, 61; and press, 66; *Daily Mail*'s advice to, 82; reputation of, 84, suspicious of manoeuvre against Labour Party, 85; Albert Hall speech, 88, 90, 93, 96; on Liberals, 89, 235; and unemployment, 91, 135, 143, 250; described by Shinwell, 93; calls for fair play, 97; becomes Prime Minister, 98; and formation of Cabinet, 99–105, 111, 276; quoted, on aims of Labour Government, 106; on Court dress, 107; and housing, 110, 121, 126, 127; Shaw's comments on, 137; and debate on Shaw's salary, 138; on electrical development, 140; and Independent Labour Party, 141; and financial policy, 144, 150, 151, 152; foreign policy, 157–81, *passim*; and Soviet recognition, 185–6; quoted, on Russian loan, 187–8; and Russian propaganda, 190; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 192, 193, 195, 205, 254; Russian policy, 206; and India, 214; and strikes, 220, 223; and Party leadership, 230–2, 272–4; and Campbell case, 238–45, *passim*; charges of corruption against, 240; on Conservative election poster, 38, 256; and Zinoviev letter, 258, 259–60, 286, 288; *The Times* on, 259; quoted, on dignity of Labour Government, 261; role in 1924 election, 266; argues against Bevin's resolution, 276; and 1931 disaster, 279; his Government evaluated, 280–1
McKenna Duties, 145, 147–8, 251
McKenzie, R. T., 101, 273
Maclean, Sir Donald, 202, 203
MacLean, Neil, 275
MacManus, Arthur, 257, 286, 287
Macmillan, Hugh Pattison, Lord, 103
McNeill, Ronald, 1st Baron Cushendun, 28, 189
Manchester, 63, 72, 270
Manchester Guardian, on power of Dissolution, 87; Snowden interview in, 167; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 200, 203; quoted, on Campbell case, 243; quoted, on Communist issue, 257; and Zinoviev letter, 258
Marchbank, J., 165
Marine Workers, 217
Marlowe, Thomas, 287, 288
Masterman, C. F. G., quoted, on Labour Cabinet, 104; on housing, 114, 117; on Wheatley, 120–1; on unemployment, 137; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 201
Maxton, James, quoted, on Labour's strength, 89; radicalism of, 96; attacks appointment of Macmillan, 103; and courts martial, 212; member of Parliamentary Labour Party Executive Committee, 233*n*; and Campbell case, 237, 242, 243
Melchett, Alfred Moritz Mond, 1st Baron, and Liberal reunion, 26; and public works, 47; on deflation, 48; in 1923 election, 71; and Borough Council of Poplar, 133; in Carmarthen by-election, 200, 249; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 202; and Communist issue, 257
Middleton, J. S., 144
Milne, A. A., 29
Miners Federation of Great Britain, 165, 166, 224, 225
Mitchell, Rosslyn, 103, 265
Mond, Sir Alfred Moritz. *See* Melchett, Alfred Moritz Mond, 1st Baron
Morel, E. D., quoted, on foreign policy, 55; in 1923 election, 64; on Foreign Office, 105, 260–1; attacks Dawes Plan, 164, 165, 166; presses Soviet recognition, 185; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 193–4
Morgan, J. H., 81–82
Morning Post, 32
Morrison, Herbert Stanley, 98, 139, 226, 265
Mosley, Oswald, 10, 120, 150

Nation, on tariff, 28–29; opposes Baldwin, 32; Keynes's, article sin, 43, 48, 150; quoted, on Liberals and Labour, 48—49; quoted, on Versailles Treaty, 50; and 1923 election, 69, 72; on Labour Government, 87, 92; Masterman's article on Wheatley in, 120–1
National Conference of Labour Women, 134
National Executive, and 1918 reorganization, 6; resolution on accepting office, 88, 89; and formation of Government, 99; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 198
National Joint Council, 217–18
National Liberal Federation, 199, 236
National Liberals, 18, 70, 79–80
National Review, 35
National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, 165, 217
National Union of Railwaymen, contribution in 1923 campaign, 65; opposes Washington Conference Conventions, 217; and Engineers' strike, 218; and nationalization, 225
National Union of Vehicle Workers, 148
Nationalization, as issue in 1923 campaign, 60; and Bank of England, 151; Labour views concerning, 152, 224–7
Nationalization of Mines, Joint Committee on, 225
Naylor, T. E., 90
New Leader, Allen's article in, 92; quoted, on unemployment, 135, 137, 140; on Snowden's Budget, 147; and financial policy, 149; on Trade Facilities Acts, 150; Morel's article in, 165; on Dawes Plan, 166; on foreign policy, 178, 188, 198, 201; on imperial policy, 214, 215; on strikes, 222–3; quoted, on MFGB nationalization bill, 224; Clynes's article in, 274
New Leader (New York), 231
New Statesman, and Baldwin, 32, 36; quoted, on unemployment, 56; and 1923 election, 61, 69, 74; quoted, on Ruhr invasion, 158
Newbold, J. T. Walton, 64
Newcastle-on-Tyne, 64, 77
Newcastle-under-Lyme, 63
Nicolson, Sir Harold, 24
Noel-Baker, Philip, 168*n*, 179
Norman, Sir Montagu, 1st Baron, 151, 152
Northern Ireland, 65, 71
Northumberland, Ian Alan Percy, 8th Duke, 50
Notes for Speakers (Labour Party), 53–54, 62

Observer, 205, 287
Oldham, 64
Olivier, Sydney, 1st Baron, at India Office, 105, 214; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 193*n*; as Minister, 230
O'Neill, J. J., 201
Osborne judgment, 1*n*
Outlook, opposes Baldwin, 32; quoted, on tariff, 46; on division in Liberal Party, 48; predicts 1923 election results, 69

Paisley, 265
Palatinate, 161
Parliamentary Labour Party, strength of, in 1905, 1; after 1910, 1–2; in 1918, 3; in 1922, 5, 18; in 1923, 70; in 1924, 264; composition of, 71, 264; discipline of, 231–2; relation with Liberals, 234—7; leadership of, 273, 274
Parliamentary Labour Party Executive Committee, 141, 146, 165, 232–3
Parmoor, Charles Alfred Cripps, 1st Baron, role in Labour Party, 9; offered Lord Presidency, 99–100; and League affairs, 167–8; and Geneva Protocol, 175–80, *passim*
Percy, Lord Eustace, 114, 117
Permanent International Court of Justice, and reparations, 162; MacDonald's proposal concerning, 173; Anglo-French resolution concerning, 174; and Geneva Protocol, 175
Pethick-Lawrence, Frederick William, 1st Baron, 71, 88
Phillipps, Vivian, 201
Poincare, Jules Henri, 158, 160–2, 181
Politis, Nikolaos Sokrates, 175
Ponsonby, Arthur, 1st Baron, and Anglo-Russian negotiations, 169, 185, 191–7, *passim*, 206; and Geneva Protocol, 178; and Zinoviev letter, 258, 288
Poplar, Borough Council of, 133–4, 204
Post Office Workers, 275–6
Pravda, 198
Press, and Conservative campaign, 1923, 31–3; and Labour campaign, 1923, 66; criticized, 72; reaction to 1923 election results, 81–82; on Labour Government, 106; and Zinoviev letter, 258–9
Preston, 63
Prevention of Evictions Bill, 127
Pringle, W. M. R., 72, 73, 125
Proportional Representation Bill, 236
Public works, Conservative programme, 133; MacDonald on, 135; Labour programme, 138–44
Punch, 82
Purcell, A. A., and McKenna Duties, 148; and Anglo-Russian Conference, 188, 193, 194; attacks Dawes Plan, 165

Railway Clerks Association, 218, 225
Rakovsky, Khristian Georgievich, suggests Soviet-Labour alliance, 185, 186, 206; seeks loan, 188; at Anglo-Russian Conference, 192, 193; and Zinoviev letter, 258
Red Flag, 96
Red Letter. *See* Zinoviev letter
Rent Restriction Acts, 111, 127
Reparations. *See* German reparations
Reparations Commission, 159, 162
Representation of the People Act, 1918, 4
Requin, Col., 171
Rhineland, 161
Roberts, Harry, 13–14
Rose, F. H., 266
Rothermere, Harold Sidney Harmsworth, 1st Viscount, 32, 33
Ruhr, French occupation of, and Conservatives, 18, 20; as issue in 1923 election, 35, 36, 49, 55; Labour's view on, 158; criticized by Dawes Committee, 159; negotiations on, 158–67, *passim*; MacDonald on, 167
Runciman, Walter, 1st Viscount, 200
Russia, relations of Labour Government with, 184–207, *passim*
Russo-Caucasian Company, 191

Safeguarding of Industries Act, 62
Saklatvala, Shapurji, 38
Salvidge, Sir Archibald T. J., 22
Samuel Commission, 225
Sanders, Sir Robert, 70*n*
Saturday Review, 32, 37
Scanlon, J., 273*n*
Scotland, Conservative-Liberal co-operation in, 64; Labour candidates, 65; Labour gains in 1923 election, 71; Liberal Party, 72; Labour losses in 1924 election, 264
Scott, A. MacCallum, 254
Scrymgeour, E., 64
Second International, 37, 167, 179, 184
Seely, John Edward Bernard, 1st Baron Mottistone, 98
"Seven Members of the Labour Party", 9, 153
Severn Barrage Plan, 139
Shaw, Thomas, at Preston, 63; and housing programme, 111; and unemployment, 134–7, 142; and strikes, 141; and Washington Conference Conventions, 217
Shinwell, Emanuel, quoted, on MacDonald, 93; on Dawes Plan, 166; and nationalization of mines, 224; and miners, 222; on Lloyd George, 236*n*; loses 1924 election, 265
Shotwell Committee, 174
Simon, E. D., 1st Baron Simon of Wythenshawe, study on housing, 113; proposes amendment to Housing Bill, 118; on Wheatley Housing Act, 121; and Prevention of Evictions Bill, 127
Simon, Sir John, 1st Viscount Simon, and Liberal reunion, 26; *Outlook* on, 46; on eviction bill, 124–5; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 200, 201
Singapore, 213
Slesser, Sir Henry, 103, 199, 239
Smillie, Robert, against Labour's accepting office, 88; refuses office, 104; and Dawes Plan, 165; chairman of Parliamentary Labour Party Executive Committee, 233; and party leadership, 273
Smith, Herbert, 166, 275
Snowden, Ethel, 8, 272
Snowden, Philip, 1st Viscount, and 1922 election, 5; characterized, 8; and evangelism, 9; on socialism, 12, 15, 16; quoted, on Conservative Government, 18; as free trader, 54; on capital levy, 59; reputation of, 84; and Labour's acceptance of office, 87–88, 89–90; on formation of Government, 99, 102, 104; financial policy, 122, 139–54, *passim*, 236, 250; on Wheatley, 134; and foreign policy, 167, 178, 193*n*, 206–7; and naval construction programme, 211; on strikes, 223; and public power, 225–6; and Gretna auction, 226; as Minister, 230; embarrasses Government, 231; on Campbell case, 242; quoted, on effect of Zinoviev letter, 267–8; quoted, on MacDonald's leadership, 272; and party leadership, 273
Socialist Review, quoted, on Snowden, 143; on Snowden's Budget, 147, 148; quoted, on India, 215; on nationalization, 227
Socialist societies, 6, 71, 264

Spectator, 31, 32, 37
Spoor, Ben, 231
Stamfordham, Arthur John Bigge, 1st Baron, 244
Star, 32
State Socialists, 3, 9
Steed, Wickham, 24, 84
Stephen, Rev. Campbell, 9
Stockport, 64
Strabolgi, Joseph Montague Kenworthy, 9th Baron, and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 187, 188, 195, 200, 204
Strikes, 2, 217–23
Sudan loan, 136, 211
Sunday Pictorial, 32–33, 37–38
Swanwick, Mrs. H. M., 173, 179
Swarajists, 214
Swinton, Philip Lloyd-Graeme, 1st Viscount, 25, 239*n*

Taff Vale decision, 1*n*
Tariff, Baldwin's speech on, 20–22; Conservative reaction to Baldwin's speech, on 22–25; as issue in 1923 election, 26–35, *passim*, 42–48, 53–54, 69, 73, 74; Baldwin's programme outlined, 27; and 1924 campaign, 251
Tariff Advisory Committee, 22
Third International, 257, 286
Thomas, J. H. characterized, 6–7, 84; and tariff, 54, 214; snobbishness of, 104, 279; mentioned for Foreign Office, 105; at Colonial Office, 106; and eviction bill, 126; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 193*n*; imperial policy, 215, 216; and engineers' strike, 218; and Campbell case, 239*n*; quoted, on Labour Party policy, 279
Thomas, Sir Robert, 236–7
Thomson, Christopher Birdwood, 1st Baron, consulted on Cabinet, 99; becomes Secretary for Air, 103; on Air Force programme, 212; and Iraq air raids, 215
Thomson, Trevelyan, 120
Thurtle, Ernest, 212
The Times, on tariff reform, 31–32, 34; and 1923 election, 32, 63, 64, 66, 69; on foreign policy, 35–36; quoted, on capital levy, 37; on defeat of eviction bill, 127; advises against ejecting Labour Government, 138; on MacDonald at London Conference, 163, quoted, on MacDonald's speech at League of Nations Assembly, 174; quoted, on Anglo-Russian Conference, 192–3; on Anglo-Russian Treaties, 197–8, 199, 204; quoted, on Labour defence policy, 213; quoted, on Thomas, 216; on union leadership, 218; on strikes, 219, 221; on Campbell case, 245; on Zinoviev letter, 257–60, *passim*; quoted, on MacDonald's constituency, 261; and 1924 election, 252, 255, 266
Tomsky, Mikhail Pavlovich, 184
Trade Facilities Acts, and Conservative Government, 133; under Labour Government, 135–6, 142; Committee for, 150; and Russia, 187
Trade Union Congress, on Labour's accepting office, 88, 89; and unemployment, 136, 143; and Russia, 157, 184, 198, 258, 286; and Dawes Plan, 165; on imperial policy, 216; and Washington Conference Conventions, 217; and strikes, 218, 221, 222; replies to criticism, 223; and relations with Labour Party, 277
Trade Union Congress (Scottish), 227
Trade Unions, role in Labour Party, 1–2, 6–7, 276, 277; representation in Parliamentary Labour Party, 5, 11, 71, 264; role of members in Government, 104, 105, 230
Tram workers' strike, 219–20
Transport and General Workers' Union, 219
Trevelyan, Sir Charles, elected in 1922, 5; experience in Government, 104; appointed to Board of Education, 105; quoted, on Snowden, 144*n*; education programme, 211; quoted, on strength of Labour Party, 277–8
Triple Alliance, 2, 5
Trotsky, Leon, 192
Turner, Ben, 12–13

Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement, 255
Unemployment, and Conservative Government, 18, 19; Baldwin's speech on, 20–21; as issue in 1923 election, 34–35, 48–49, 56–58; MacDonald on, 110; extent and causes of, 131–2; Labour programme, 131–54, *passim*, 281; and "five cruisers", 211, 212; as issue in 1924 election, 250, 251
Unemployment Grants Committee, 142
Unemployment Insurance Acts, 57, 134
Union of Democratic Control, interest in foreign policy, 55, 157; representation in Cabinet, 105; and Dawes Plan, 165–6
United States, and reparations, 158; and Geneva Protocol, 179, 180

Varley, Julia, 143
Versailles Treaty as issue in 1923 election, 50. 55, 56; Labour attitude toward, 157, 160; and Dawes Plan, 162; Henderson on, 169

Wales, 71, 265
Wallhead, R. C., 194, 233*n*
Walsh, Stephen, 9, 103, 104, 106
Wansbeck, 77
War Debt, 19
War Debt Redemption Levy. *See* Capital levy
Warth, R. D., 287*n*
Washington Conference Conventions, 217
Webb, Beatrice, role in Labour Party, 8, 9; on Conservative-Liberal Coalition, 87; organizes social life for M.P.s, 232; *Diaries* cited, on unexpectedness of 1923 election results, 69; on Labour leaders' decision to accept office, 88; on Labour Government, 91, 92; on formation of Cabinet, 101; on Haldane and electrical development, 140; on Snowden, 143–4, 148; on Keynes, 151; on Labour's unemployment policy, 153; on Wheatley, 230; on Cabinet, 231; on MacDonald, 240, 273
Webb, Sidney, 1st Baron Passfield, and 1918 constitution of Labour Party, 2; *Labour and the New Social Order*, 3; role in Labour Party, 8, 9; on Labour's decision to accept office, 88; against compromise with Liberals, 90; and formation of Cabinet, 99, 100, 102; on Electricity Commissioners, 140; and unemployment, 142; as Minister, 230; prefers Labour Party as Opposition, 275
Wedgwood, Col. Josiah, role in Labour Party, 9; in 1923 election, 63; and formation of Cabinet, 100, 102–3, 105; quoted, on public works, 149; and Geneva Protocol, 178; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 193*n*; and Swaraj, 214; and strikes, 219, 220, 222; as Minister, 230; on Labour-Liberal co-operation, 234; attacks MacDonald's leadership, 273; on Government's dependence on Civil Service, 279
Weekly Dispatch, 250
Wells, H. G., 272
Wertheimer, Egon, 15

West Toxteth (Liverpool), 249
Westminster Abbey, 249
Westminster Gazette, and 1923 election, 32, 66; and Anglo-Russian Treaties, 200–4, *passim*
Wheatley, John, appointed Minister of Health, 105; characterized, 111; housing programme, programme, 111–22, 124, 126; Masterman's description of, 120–1; and Borough Council of Poplar, 133–4; quoted, on free trade, 148; as Minister, 230; Kirkwood's comment on, 232; and party leadership, 272, 273; quoted, on release of Labour from responsibility, 275
Wheatley Housing Act, introduced, 114–15; debate on, 117–20; success of, 121–2
Wilkinson, Ellen, 265
Williams, Francis, 13
Wilson, Sir Charles, 31
Women's Unionist Organization, 29
Wood, Edward. *See* Halifax, Edward Frederick Lindley Wood, 3rd Viscount
Wood, Sir Kingsley, 114
Workers' Weekly, 237, 242

Young, Sir E. Hilton, 71
York, Duke of (King George VI), 104*n*
Yorkshire, 264
Yorkshire Post, 32

Zinoviev letter, 257–61, 266–9, *passim*, 286–8

30739